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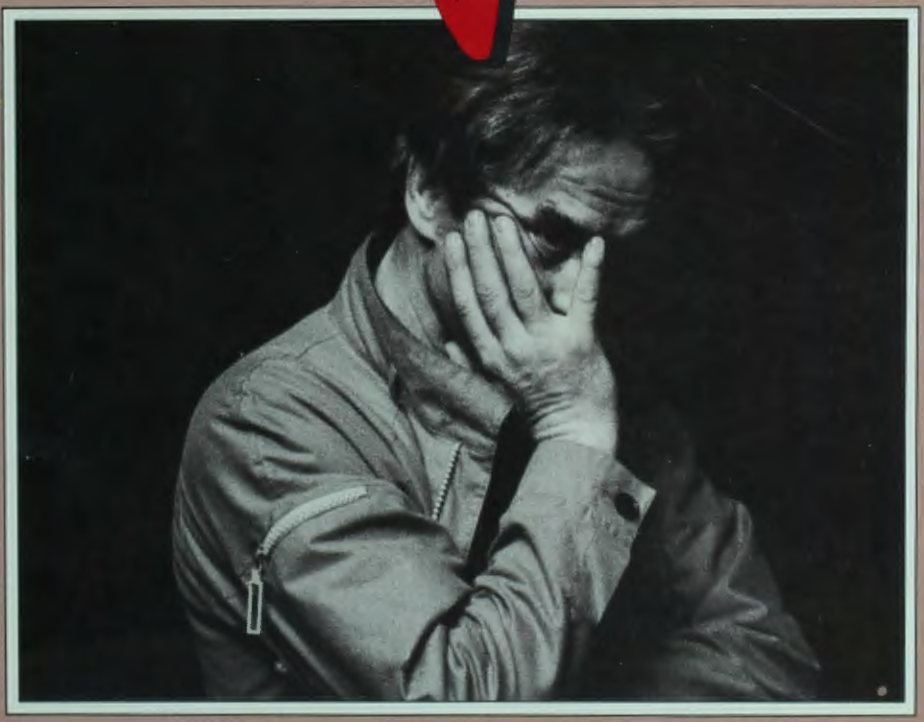

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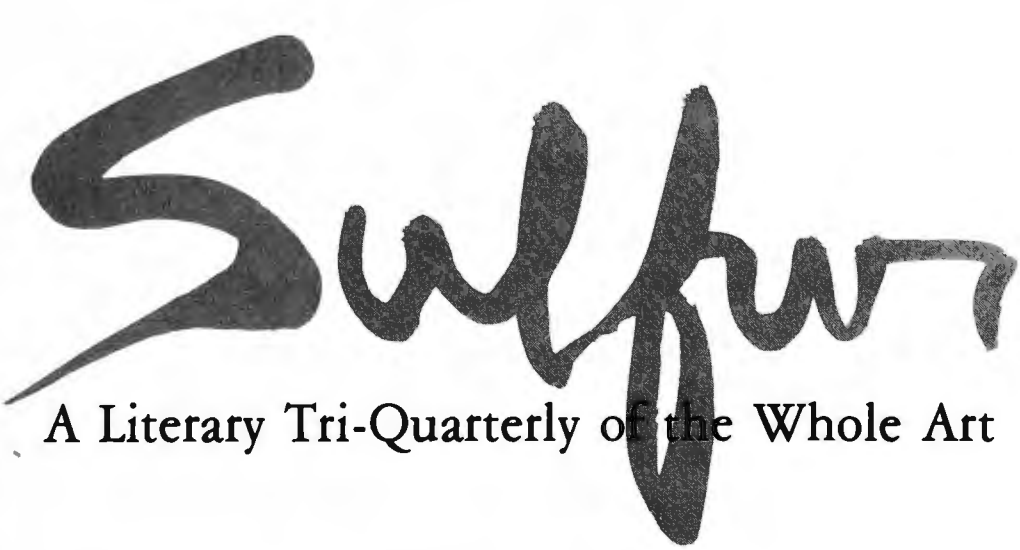

A Literary Tri-Quarterly of the Whole Art

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Maithuna

Translated from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger

My eyes discover you
naked
        and cover you
with a warm rain
of glances

•

A cage of sounds
                open
to the morning
                whiter
than your thighs
                at night
your laughter
                and even more your foliage
your blouse of the moon
                as you leap from bed

Sifted light
                the singing spiral
reels-in whiteness
                Chiasm
X
  planted in a chasm

.

My day
exploded
in your night
Your cry
leaps in pieces
Night
spreads
your body
washing under
your bodies
knot
Your body once again

.

Vertical hour
drought
spins its flashing wheels
Garden of knives
feast of deceit
Through these reverberations
you enter
unscathed
the river of my hands

.

Quicker than fever
you swim in the darkness
your shadow clearer
between caresses
your body blacker
You leap
to the bank of the improbable

toboggans of how when because yes
Your laughter burns your clothes
your laughter
wets my forehead my eyes my reasons
Your body burns your shadow
You swing on the trapeze of fear
the terrors of your childhood
watch me
from your cliffhanging eyes
wide-open
making love
at the cliff
Your body clearer
Your shadow blacker
You laugh over your ashes

•

Burgundy tongue of the flayed sun
tongue that licks your land of sleepless dunes
hair unpinned
tongue of whips
spoken tongues
unfastened on your back
enlaced
on your breasts
writing that writes you
with spurred letters
disowns you
with branded signs
dress that undresses you
writing that dresses you in riddles
writing in which I am buried
Hair unpinned
the great night swift over your body

jar of hot wine
spilled
on the tablets of the law
howling nude and silent cloud
cluster of snakes
cluster of grapes
trampled
by the cold soles of the moon
rain of hands leaves fingers wind
on your body
on my body on your body
Hair unpinned
foliage of the tree of bones
the tree of aerial roots that drink night from the sun
The tree of flesh The tree of death

.

Last night
in your bed
we were three:
the moon you & me

.

I open
the lips of your night
damp hollows
unborn
echoes:

whiteness
a rush
of unchained water

.

To sleep to sleep in you
or even better to wake
to open my eyes
at your center
black white black
white
To be the unsleeping sun
your memory ignites
(and
the memory of me in your memory

.

And again the sap skywise
rises
(salvia your name
is flame)
Sapling
crackling
(rain
of blazing snow)
My tongue
is there
(Your rose
burns through the snow)
is
now
(I seal your sex)
dawn
from danger drawn

△

Stokes Howell

Mother

ACCORDING TO THE PLUMBER something is plugging up the works. He's gone off to get some sort of a damn stick with a gadget on the end of it to run down in there. I asked him what happened to his brother. The last time both of them came. I lost my bud, he had a cancer, he said. My bud, he knew animals. One place we worked their mule was acting funny. My bud said, Get some salt meat grease, that mule's hurting. I came back with a bucket of grease. He took some and ran his hand up the shaft where that mule's dick was. He spread it around in there. In a minute the mule's dick came out. It was two feet long. The shaft had got full up with dirt blowing in there and he couldn't get his dick out to piss. When it came out it was covered with big scales of dry caked dirt. It was the awfullest thing you've ever seen.

I sympathized. I told him I lost my mother not too long ago. Her sarcophagus is on order. Copy of an ancient tomb, only two others in existence according to the ad. Scipio's if I'm not mistaken, in granite. His was rifled.

Mother used to visit me here on occasion. This scarecrow had a permanent residence in a sort of asylum for the aged and the infirm,

where her body and I presume her soul clawed on thanks to an annuity I provided, anonymously of course, to spare her pride, and to avoid in our relations anything that smacked of gratitude. It is a fact that people will literally cram themselves down your throat, if you let them, to show how terrifically grateful they are, until you gag on it and swear to keep to yourself in the future. But I'm satisfied she had no inkling of my little device, and that if she came to see me it was for her own benefit.

I too went to see her, one time, at the home. It was a cozy enough place to putrify in, convenient to the cemetery and the church not far either. Judging by her rate of disintegration I figured she was good for another decade at the most, barring new discoveries in medicine. Most of the roomers sat benignly in armchairs enjoying any of several near-comatose states, not always at the public expense. Outside Mother's door an old woman nearly tore the sleeve off my shirt and started shouting No no give it to me give it to me I'm thirsty I'm thirsty Joe Joe, and so on, right in my face, everything twice, little sutras to placate her phantoms, in an extraordinarily nasal voice.

Mother's roommate turned out to be a congenial old prune named Mrs. Leaf, one hundred and three years old, just one of an impressive number of veritable ancients on the roster. This flabby skeleton had sparkling eyes, no teeth, and was extremely pleasant, smiling and laughing for no reason at all. She obviously knew how to pass the time. For my part I engaged in lighthearted banter, mostly with myself. For Mother said very little, nothing in fact, being preoccupied with the operation of her fluorescent table lamp, a simple affair of a red button and a black button, one on, one off, neither of which she could bring herself to push, though she did execute several promising approaches to both only to retract at the last second. I stayed for lunch. The nurse, an obvious nymphomaniac, wheeled in a cart of trays set with food and brightly colored capsules. She immediately set upon Mrs. Leaf and did her best to spoon a goblet of beige liquid down her throat. Mrs. Leaf wasn't having any. The old battler wasn't

going to be browbeaten at this late stage of the game. Over the clatter of dishes and Mrs. Leaf's giggles came louder chanting from the hall: Come here come here the stove the stove Joe Joe Joe Joe Joe . . . . It grew fainter as the attendants wrestled her away. Mrs. Leaf soon passed out with a smile on her face, something in the water I suspect, and as Mother got terribly interested in the arrangement of the doilies on her bedside table I took off without further ado.

The place fit Mother like a glove. For some time all I had been able to wring out of her were disjointed statements and queries, chiefly of a religious nature. I know where she picked it up, I remember a lot of it myself. She seemed to be stuck on one particular song, a gloomy little tune from some miserable worm-eaten hymnal. The chorus ran "da di da fear the grave da di," just a little something to hum to yourself for consolation at the sad end of a sad day. For no telling how many consecutive years she and I sat through that sort of gloomy trash every Sunday, and I got my belly full of it. But it's funny how I remember those mute hours now with a twinge of bliss, ugh, but it's true. And that only goes to prove that practically anything dredged up from childhood, no matter how repulsive to the present day, knows how to array itself in dulcet hues. The hours I spent in the warm atmosphere of the sanctuary, the sun filtering through windows of ocher and squash, still innocent, still ignorant! I sat at Mother's side, eyes piously raised to a stained-glass representation of the hills, in this version curiously bare and stony but for a line of firs on the spine of the slopes, which my heretical imagination transformed into two stegosauri, hopeless Biblical impossibilities of course. But the hilly vista did not fail to provide the guaranteed help, as through its intercession I rode out the most seductive temptations, on the one hand to fall asleep, on the other to feast my eyes on the sumptuous figure of Mrs. Burcham in the choir loft, which no robe could disguise. Of course when the choir rose for the Doxology it was all over with me. The Lord himself would have faltered in the face of that heaving bosom as Mrs. Burcham conquered the upper reaches of

the scale. Incidentally I wasn't the only person so skewered. The deacon directly in front of us was shameless in his attentions to the soprano chair. And one obese elder in the rear regularly snored through the entire service, roused only by the benediction. His was a sonorous drone, with now and then a violent snort that woke whole rows from their daydreams. And sometimes, in contrast, his nose whistled like a tea kettle, when a hair or booger stuck in there sideways for minutes on end. And periodically his great bulk was the epicenter of a series of loud explosions, the product of unpleasant memories of troubled digestion. If the interval between snores seemed too great I began to think he might be dead, and I waited anxiously for the next breath to save him. It came, and I was free again to admire the little girl in a white sundress one pew over, or gaze at the light fixture in the ceiling whose pane was black with bugs roasted to death on the bulb.

It sounds like a frolic, but in reality I was under constant scrutiny. The slightest faux pas and I would be imprisoned in my room for the afternoon. But during Mother's senescence it was I who became the custodian. In pity I let her think she was in charge of the kitchen, a grave error as it turned out. She insisted on cooking for me. Her initial coddled eggs were a runny mess. The simplest things are the first to go I suppose. When I complained she nimbly reversed her field, boiling the eggs over a flame that would have served to char a steer, so that the yolks were overdone and tasted like chalk. Naturally she botched the coffee too, so that I wound up swilling down this time a thin brown fluid, and the next time having to suck hard to get down a black sludge the consistency of porridge. And speaking of porridge, the mess she made of the oatmeal makes me want to puke just thinking about it. Oh she made a big deal out of it, flourishing the pot and spoon and stirring and singing, just like she knew what was going on, but the results I found in my bowl spoke volumes of her talents, being either a sticky paste or a number of lumpy clods. And the way Mother herself ate, always drooling, I don't want to think about it, it made me sick.

Yet this same pathetic being in her better days had charge of me, her duty as she saw it to curb the excesses of my youth. One memorable spring I was in love, delirious and intoxicated beyond all reason, in hot pursuit of a girl from Sunday School. I was inflamed, the weather was balmy, and I spent a giddy Sunday afternoon of a church outing chasing after her, making a fool of myself. When the group went fishing I pointed out the best fishing spots in a loud voice, like an impressario, or someone of importance at any rate, then stood by triumphantly as fish after hapless fish was barbarously hooked and jerked out of the water, left to flap and suffocate in the choking weeds. I caught her eye and won her over. At dusk we sat side by side around the fire. The group was loud and cheerful, in a word far too much like a Sunday School outing, from which it is almost impossible to escape without notice. We ate weenies. The conversations went on, I have no doubt on the most trivial topics imaginable. Horses were mentioned. She said she adored them, so I seized on the pretext to lead her to the stables. On the way across a long dark lawn I put my arm around her waist. She reciprocated. This was encouraging, in fact I couldn't have done without it. In no time we were in the stables and going at it like professionals on a horse blanket. She had all the right parts, as near as I could make out, and perfect teeth. There wasn't much to it, a few grunts from her and some ill-conceived thrashing on my part. The mosquitoes were exceedingly fierce. A horse had its head over the stall watching us. She reached up and rubbed its face, something I never do, due to some terrifying experiences as a child. Well, Mother got wind of it. One of her lieutenants must have blabbed on us. She didn't get all the facts though, judging by the nature of her accusations. Or maybe she was too embarrassed to refer to the more repugnant details. She confined herself to the declaration of the following law, namely that she wouldn't have me running with sluts, risking infection and disease. And in this connection she brought up the edifying but seldom mentioned case of Uncle Bunn, an agronomist of some note who brought down great suffering upon

him and his, a judgment, she said, on his reckless youth. Bunn married and begat a child upon his wife. The child wasn't right. It was off-center. It died young and it was a good thing. Later Bunn himself went up the flume. In his dying delirium his agricultural visions were magnificent. He began sanely enough, with a reasoned discourse insisting that the idea that the Hessian fly attacks oats has absolutely no foundation in nature. And he plowed a fairly straight furrow with the sobering information that St. John's weed has the peculiarity of affecting only white-haired animals, though it will act just as lethally upon a red-haired animal with white hair around its nose or feet. But he began to lose his grip on the subject of the guinea pig, which he said could be eaten, though generally speaking they are not disposed of in this manner, and finally he signalled his approaching end by an aroused and obscene monologue on the properties of boar semen, a gelatinous material resembling tapioca.

My butterfly existence soon came to an end. I was sold into slavery to Mr. Tate, a dyspeptic storekeeper, in accordance with the theory, not altogether without merit, that hard work would keep me from mischief. And I performed ably for that butthole, up to a point, and at that point I was fired for a bit of mayhem involving his prize sow. In front of the store was a muddy depression in great favor with this enormous female. She generally lay there from morning to dusk, when the sirenic calls of Mr. Tate lured her to the trough several blocks away. At the first sound of his whoopings she would struggle from the wallow to her feet and with rapid little steps make her way home, a pilgrimage graven in the twilight since prehistoric times it seemed. This sow, Zella, was the esteemed mother of scores, including on one notable occasion (to the astonishment of Mr. Tate, who left the whelping room in disbelief only to return after a shot of whisky to verify what he had seen) a two-headed piglet that was sadly short-lived. One morning, before Zella showed up to man her station, I took it into my head to pour into her puddle a quantity of turpentine that did not exceed three quarts. Zella arrived, rooted

about distractedly, and with the naive trust of the domestic animal settled happily down into a perfect hell. Within seconds she began to grunt uncomfortably, then abruptly rose and ran off with considerable interest in search of relief. This galloping in itself was a serious matter, as Mr. Tate wouldn't appreciate the fat she ran off, nor the hazard to her limbs as she careered down the street. Yet more serious was the calamity of portly Mrs. Nelson, out for her morning constitutional, who was trampled flat when the tormented pig ran between her legs. Along with incalculable damage to her dignity she suffered a hairline fracture of the wrist. In a sense my dismissal was medicinal, a forfeit to salve the spiritual and physical wounds endured by Mrs. Nelson, who not coincidentally was a heavy consumer of the various female compounds sold at the store.

Bunn mad, Mother mad, it's a regular epidemic. Most of the time she didn't anymore know where she was than shit on a stick. Oh I don't doubt that occasionally some feeble light made its way upward from the bottom of the mess, taking the form perhaps of a little mental picture, or maybe just a feeling, vague dread for instance, that lasted the length of a shudder than vanished, another speck in the dust bin. She began to resurrect the dead, including her cat, who I am convinced by the way was an atheist, and station them on the sofa. It didn't bother me, I was used to it, but it tended to shake up the guests when she referred to them as her mother or father, or as both, turn and turn again. And if by a stroke of luck she got the person's name right, and even hit a streak where her first two or three statements made a little sense, by her fourth or fifth utterance something was bound to escape her lips that struck an anxious chord in the visitor's stomach, and by the sixth or seventh she was rattling off things so utterly mad that she had the thoroughly spooked guest smiling and nodding in assent while frantically casting about the room for his wrap, which I had cunningly lodged in an inaccessible closet at the back of the house. But they never had to squirm for long, because Mother would suddenly jump up and leave the room without so

much as a comma, thinking she was being paged in a railroad station, or being wheeled away to the delivery room to have a baby.

That she confused the living and the dead was no big deal, often the difference is so slight as to make this a very sound point of view. And her custom of wiping her rear end with the cotton bath towels wasn't an insuperable problem, I simply kept mine under lock and key and destroyed hers every month or so. But when her wits scattered like chaff, when objects, those boundary stones for the world of accredited reality, lost for her all intelligibility, so that she wore her panties on her head for a hat, mistook her bureau for the stove and reduced it to ashes, and dipped drinking water from the toilet bowl when she was thirsty, delights foresworn by the tiniest infant imbecile, given the proper training of course, well, it got to be an aggravation.

One day the home called. Your mother is loose, they said. She's bound to show up there by dark, they added. We'll be by to round her up. Fine, I said, all three times. I told my man Del to stand watch at the gate. He threw a fit. Said he'd get a job with the railroad. I didn't blame him, I'd just about had it with those jackasses myself. If they couldn't hold back a skinny demented old woman, though admittedly far from frail and fiercely determined, what good were they at all? They were lucky to get her in the first place. All things considered she had an ideal situation with her room above the cafe. A fat woman ran the place, keeping her father, my mother, and thirty cats upstairs. It's not imaginable, but I think Mother and the old man had some sort of a romance going on. The fires are not quenched even near the end it would seem. Anyway, Mother did the cooking (Good God!), the fat woman guarded the door with a mesh flyswatter, and her father tended counter. This old man had too much blood. The doctors pumped a pint a week out of him. In my opinion his condition was caused at least in part by his overweening hatred of mailmen, who always tore his magazines to shreds, after reading

them at the post office for a week or two of course. He paid taxes, their salaries in fact, supported their families, by God he practically owned the goddamned post office, and the treatment he got from those impudent piss-ants in return was a disgrace, and so on in this vein. But in general all was well in this little household. Then the fat woman and her boyfriend decamped, or eloped, at any rate left her father and Mother in the lurch. The shock shoved the old man over the brink. While I packed Mother's things he chattered a tale how on a porch in India he had grabbed a hoe and chopped snakes for half an hour. Then he moved on to Australia where he and four service buddies were locked overnight in a Pullman with six whores. We left him riding machete in hand into a panicked village in the jungles of South America, where smack dab in the middle of the market place a boa constrictor was swallowing the town goat, and no one lifting a finger to save it.

Anyway, I smoothed things over with Del. He just had the piles that day. He threatens to quit every time a frog pisses. He took up his post at the gate and I went inside to clean my pistol. It was impossible to predict these visits of Mother's. In order to reach me she first had to get clear of the home, a flight made all the more difficult since much of the time she was restrained, as they put it, by straps. I never learned what subterfuge delivered her from the grounds, much less by what means she was able to locomote cross-country. She would surge out of the blue toting a box of chocolates, the very one, I am confident, sent by me each week to the home. I'm on furlough, she would say. I never disputed her on the matter, nor indeed on anything else she might hazard to declare. She would take a seat and proceed to flounder in and out of a number of moods of extraordinary variety, several of which I was on the verge of pinning down with some accuracy here in the wild, so to speak. For instance, sometimes she must have thought she was young again. She would flirt with some invisible suitor, batting her ruined eyelashes, tossing her last three strands of hair as though she had a flowing mane. In brief, the

best approximation of a coquette she could muster, given her resources, a frightful display. Then when the attendants from the home materialized to retrieve her, she called them hyenas and other gross epithets, abusing them in a foul and shocking manner until the injection took effect and her limp form slid from view inside the maw of the ambulance.

Mother's previous visit had been most illuminating. She let me in on the news that she had recently visited heaven, where she spoke with God and all of her kinfolk, including mercifully her own poor mother, who was bitten in the bloom of life by a hydrophobic rat terrier and suffered the usual horrible death consequent. This circumstance turned Mother against dogs, to the extent that she made a cat her closest companion. Kitty was a mean but charming little pet she rescued from certain death at the hands of a pack of snarling dogs bent on having her for supper. Mother waded into them with a broom handle and emerged holding a naked furless scrap of a kitten. And this trauma so early in her career no doubt accounts for Kitty's suspicious nature, and hence her long life. Even to persuade her to eat you had to stand at the top of the steps and shout Here Kitty Kitty Kitty Kitty Kitty until your lungs burst, and only then would she peek from under a bush three feet away and warily come forward for her meal. I believe Kitty was determined to die a natural death, unattended by the fury of blood and crushing of bones so woefully common in the annals of her race. And sure enough in the end she was undone not by her enemy the dog but by some internal disorder that was rotting her insides. She mewled hideously for days before the veterinarian could crawl under the house and dispatch her with a pill or a ball bat, I really don't know.

I waited all that afternoon, a bit anxious, all sorts of thoughts running through my head. But Mother didn't show up. I was about to pack it in when three gentlemen from the home talked their way past Del, there's nothing easier, and came into the house. It took me a while to understand what they were getting at. Your mother is dead

was the gist of their message. It seems Mother had refused to eat for several days. Then she disappeared. They found her collapsed in a corn field. In that case maybe she wasn't on her way to see me at all, but merely gone out to graze. At least they found her before the crows got to her. That could have been a real mess. The gentlemen were embarrassed about the matter, understandably so. They wouldn't leave, just sat around hemming and hawing for the better part of an hour. I listened to all of their apologies and excuses then fired three shots into the wall over their heads. Then they couldn't get out the door fast enough. I got a hat out of the affair. I doubt they'll return for it.

There was a funeral. Mother looked like a sturgeon, in spite of everyone's best efforts. But no matter, she was out of mortal hands long before, long before. I fancy she has a place in the celestial choir, perhaps alongside Mrs. Burcham, who burst a vein in mid-cantata, singing of release and light and the souls yet caught in sin's dark dungeon. To tell the truth Mother wasn't much of a singer on earth, but who knows what gifts are given above, where she basks now, in recompense for toil below, where still I think she slogs across a dreary plain, plying toward me.

△

War & Peace

1

People are not music.
A person is not a species.
Species are not myths.
A prerogative leads speech
To the slaughterhouse of its choice.
A pile of money beneath
A nuclear umbrella pines
For a secure century. Sounds
Parade to the brain, stop & think.
ID card advancing through
The human face. History
Is a bluff, a sheer drop
Onto non-sequential rocks.
Nobody out there's talking.
A dog could sing Virgil
And mean it: Weapons & the Hero.
Yield your excitement to
The state and thrill
In the basement of a grander
Design, a more detached blueprint.

2

A circle starts anywhere inside

Its definition. It ends in the brain.
A colonel is eating lunch, tactfully.
It ends in a dream which cannot
Be shut off by the senses.
Shapes give offense. Distortion
Doesn't help. Crude ideas
In Washington get cruder as they're
Implemented. The army wants
To conquer the city and provide
All natives everywhere with free
Access to payphones. Writing
At the end of the hand. I wish
I was sleeping with Francie this afternoon.
I wish the government was in the mouths
Of whoever lives here.

3

Once and for all, the story
Begins. Eyes want proof now,
While they're open. The shadow
Of a jet moves up the hill, like reading
War and Peace without blinking.
The end of the world is one card in the deck.
My son cuts my head off, solves
That problem. Fossil speech in the brain
Ritualizes, blasphemes, an actor expressing
What memory has no time for.
They're practice-bombing No Man's Land.

4

If some clairvoyant
Picked this up

In a world
Of body art,
The conditional would
Have the same
Force as here:
Paper face up,
One life per
Sequence of rhetorical
Homes on streets
Where meaning conflicts
With the open mouth.

5

The unity of the sacred pin-ups,
Given in advance of the broken
Sensations, fetches more often than not
A vigorous salute from the abased
Personal unit on display in the grand
Sentence. Malcontents duck out of that wind.
Habits grow big and hard to balance.
Crossed out people, things you can't
Help saying. Manikins yield
Themselves and series of rules.
No official excuse for having a body.
Sinners lay down the law.

6

The existing monuments form
An emphatic No. These words
Weren't in my head
A generation ago.
Far from solving the problem,

Birth only accents itself,
Leaving a soul or body
For irony to govern. Social
Life looks like endless
Distance at first, filled
Up close with ecstatic hunger.
The afterlife leads to
Ice underfoot, steam
Coming out of the mouth.
The statuary nods familiarly
And suggests corrections. My spine
Is twisting to the left.
The dog may be haunted.
The person, with a case history
And a ready set of paradoxes,
Is in no position.
The food in the icebox
Is to eat. Say something.

7

A real paper cup left out
In the rain is full of meaning
The next morning. If time
Goes backwards & the mind
Is a reduplicating orgasm,
Then the flesh can live
To forgive itself. Grammar
Is so explanatory. Dreams
Want to go on forever. That's not
Where I live. Soldiers
Of the deliquescent empire die
And are the dear departed.
People tend to live,

Gravitate toward fire.
The explanations are so emotional.

8

Some guy stands in his shoes,
Approximating a point. The sayings
Of authority are absolute, lashing
The sea, invading the lairs
Of honest folk who live in the past
Where elves make shoes without
Stopping or ever getting paid.
The world is made of wax, and once
The word is given, millions
Of bodies are pressed. You
Can always get a job as a cop on TV.
It's windy this morning, making
A specific effort down a long
Instrumental passage. I'm up,
Pressing objects down. Scotch tape
Dispenser in front, carved sleeping
Ducks farther back. Four screws
In each drawer handle. Chicken Licken
Goes to Washington. A personal question
Gets a rock orbiting the sun.
Colette says: "Yesterday's river, and
My arrival in rivulets. Now day
Burning sleeves. Conscious color
Is a caress. Very touching,
A rounded little body crosses the road,
Itemizing my absence. I admire
How soon I am protected by the wind."

9

Is intelligent life too smart
To leave its memory buried
In dumb matter two thousand years
Later cruising at thirty thousand feet?
Intelligent life demands an obedient
Biology, gets nameless divisions.
The Gettysburg Address. History
Pales inside the private reader.
Foaming around the bit, the citizen
Desires a stable series of roads
On which to choose. Clucks, whistles,
Soft coos in the leaves mime
The lovers' displeasure at daybreak.
Armed to the teeth, America falls
To its knees, bony protruberances.
The topsoil is our history.

10

These are the tools
Of persuasion. Mistaken
For a stick, the bug
Doesn't get eaten. But let's
All be friends, like the tree
And the chair on Sesame Street.
"Crush," says my two year old,
Perceiving my knee in a friendly
Explosion of symbolic possibility
Before dinner. Let's get
Physical, sings Olivia Newton-John,
As she's thrown into a furnace

On tv. The war that dares not
Speak its name, the Department
Of Defense can't find the right
Country, but can't wait. Somewhere,
Does the ideal reader shepherd
The letters over the actual
Confused, numb recording
And decoding apparatus?
Skating up a hill of water.
Absolute certainty: that's
Where babies come from.

Diane Wakoski

Three Poems

The Ring of Irony

What do you say to the mother
of a homosexual man
whom you once were married to,
when she asks you to return your wedding ring
because it's a family heirloom?
"I want to keep it on my key ring
where I carry it now,
to remind me of my loss?"
or perhaps, in spite,
"It was the only thing
I ever got out of the marriage.
No. I won't give it back."
Do you say that you love irony
and have imagined your whole life
governed by understatement
and paradox?
Yet, the obvious dominates and
I ask myself,
"Why do you want to keep it?
Surely the woman deserves some comfort/
if a small piece of gold can do it,
who can object?"
Wallowing again, in the obvious,
I wonder at my meanness,

my own petty anger
at men who love other men,
Alas, some of them are/have been
my best friends. Irony?
No. The obvious.
Why do you want that circle of gold
lying in your purse with keys
and checkbooks? I nudge myself.
Why don't you purchase an ounce of gold
and carry it in a velvet bag instead. Your
own.
Worth so much more.
Of course. The obvious.
Because the other was given,
not bought, and you
have never asked the return of your gifts, but
you know, Diane, why
you anguish over putting the ring in the box and
mailing if off to
Corona, California.
So obvious.
Because you believe in the gifts
freely given
to appease destiny.
You too would sacrifice
Iphegenia or Isaac
for the cap of darkness,
having given your children
for poetry,
having given your sexuality
for beautiful men,
having relinquished honor
for music.

The circle of gold,
that ring, symbolizes
the pact.
To give it back says the giving was meaningless.
Fate does not honor your bargain,
Ms. Wakoski. Not irony,
the obvious:
you have no husband,
no house,
no children,
no country
You have no fame,
fortune,
only remaindered books,
and innocent students who
stab you
with their lack of understanding,
asking, no not ironically,
"did you give a lot of readings
when you were young?"
Finally, the understatement, the irony, when I say,
"yes," and the past swallows up everything,
leaving the obvious,
and now that handsome woman in California
wants to take the ring.

Soap opera of the middle-aged
schoolteacher?
What do you say when irony deserts you
for the maudlin obvious?
"I am mailing you the ring.
Your claim is greater than mine."

Irony? No, the obvious.

For The Girl With Her Face In A Rose

This tapestry which I've never seen
woven in 1901
depicts your wish of self,
disembodied,
the face floating in a giant
florabunda,
the seeker near your rose-enclosed lips,
listening for your voice.
Perhaps this is wisdom.

My own wish cannot be seen in any
weaving
but in the flesh itself
of calla lily,
pale curled flowers with their yellow
pollen-covered fingers
on which no one ever slips
a golden ring.

The wish to be alive
at my own death
which I would want never to come
except as the season's apple, plum,
corriander, pansy,
leek, corn.

I would give up any voice,
even the whisper on these pages
if I would not have to die.
If even
I could age until I fall away from my bones

like the sticky apricots
under late summer's buzzing tree.
Not even the wish
to be young and fresh
and eternally a flower.
Rather, not to die.
Not to suffer pain.
Not to lose my breath.

△

Joyce Carol Oates Plays The Saturn Piano

for Joyce Carol Oates, who, several years ago, began to study the piano again

I promised myself
that if, by 40, I had won a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry
I would let myself play the piano again.
This was when I was 20,
still pounding on the keyboard,
relentlessly, as if I were chopping down dozens of trees,
and splitting the logs,
making enough firewood for a castle
to be heated throughout an entire Russian winter.

I longed for tea in Samovars,
and to wear sable.
The Snow Queen glinted snow roses, ice violets, tuna-bright
daggers,
as I spoke with stiff lips.
My fingers were frozen too,

against the brilliance of local pianists
Abromovitch,
del Tredici,
Goodman,
Ury.
Unlike you,
during the four undergraduate years,
I did not win a Phi Beta Kappa key,
write three novels and marry my sweetheart. I ran across
Dwinelle Plaza barefooted in winter
carrying a wicker birdcage,
I wept in classes, puffed up like a mushroom,
spoke laments
which embarrassed everyone,
and played, played, played,
Beethoven and
Chopin
mostly, trying to substitute music
for sex, for love, for security and kindness.
Unlike you,
I was no combination,
clicking shut like an expensive lock,
of beauty and brains.
I did not have your dark eyes like Godiva chocolates
or your Emily Bronte smile.
I could not even talk,
though most poets' lips moved like a swarm of Japanese fantailed
goldfish at feeding, pursing for the scattered breadcrumbs.

It was California, but my lips were rigid
with some Northern climate
outside of geography.
My fingers too, though I flexed and flexed

them.
How I hated the rich girls in my classes
who were being
expensively
psychoanalysed (how I needed to tell
my histories),
and who played Bach
sitting decorously, neatly, on the piano bench
like little hair brushes,
while I grimaced and swayed and rocked on the bench
with each cadence, until my practice room
must have seemed like
an exercise cell for some crippled gymnast,
one who had to do all her exercises sitting
in a single position.

The first years of not playing
were empty ones.
Perhaps I was grateful not to own a stereo, have records or afford many concerts.
From Cage and Creeley I learned about silence.
About the "missing"
as part of the object.
And the possibilities I longed for
bred in this silence.
The Ice Queen showed me the beauty of death,
and longing.
The ice needle words which I could emit
from frozen mouth.

Each decade
I would look at my hands,
losing their muscles and flexibility,

until after 20 years
I realized that I could no more return to playing the piano
with any of the skill I'd worked for
than one could go out on a winter day and pick a favorite rose
which he had seen bloom months ago
and remembered,
from that summer. Not even the dried hip
would be there.

And I have passed 40 now,
some years ago.
No Pulitzer Prize.
You have had numerous awards with that big one looming up
for you now, very soon,
while my name is never even mentioned in connection
with such things.
And I thought I had forgotten all about that young pledge
until I entered your house
and saw the upright piano covered
with music I used to play,
and heard your voice,
flashing like a marlin when it jumps and twists in Carribean
waters,
saying, "yes I am
taking piano lessons again. I practice
two hours every day."
Envy?
No. Past that.
A sense of failure?
Perhaps. For I gave up something
I loved/ to attain something
unknown, and now I have neither.

What do I have?

I wear the rings of Saturn, all
nine of them on my hands,
and when I listen to the keyboard
I hear a music
beyond what anyone can play.

All that wood I chopped
years ago
makes a bright fire,
and when it is dead,
maybe the cinders will begin to move in orbit,
begin whirling,
begin spinning,
around me. I will be Saturn,
and my rings will be
hundreds of pianos, rotating,
revolving around my dried ashy body.

When you play your piano, Joyce,
a chunk of rock might fall into your garden, near the river,
where an old pike nuzzles down near its industrial bottom.
You will say,
"I am playing Saturn's piano,"
and the ring on your long-married, sweetheart, wonderful prize-
winning
finger will, perhaps, for a moment
glow, as will the rock in your garden,
as a piano always does
when someone with inspired hands throws it into orbit.

△

Randy White

Four Poems

between
not
speech
but
light
&
echo
all
magnificent
indivisable
sounds,
stones
skipping
eleven
times
across

some
seasons
some
places
this
river
is
one
leap
across

△

in
sight
the
falls,
dark
edge
hanging
plume
galvanized
the
roar
instant
iris

cathedraline
rubble

roil
&
baptismal
all

a
symmetry

△

in a ring of stone
measures
kindling
measures

dying,
twig ends
then wand
upon wand:
man-
zanita
oak-
leaves
yellowpine-
barks

this
architectural tinder

this fire
of many edges

this

our quick
carbon
dance

△

o
moon
head

nipple
stone

pale

stone

eye
unfolds
honey
calm
now
that skin
fills space
words
could not

now
lichen
long as dreams
attaches to everything

like this
shivering
gravity

amorous
whitewater
falling
& falling

Bread and Wine

Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman and Bernard Bador

By the one who furls back the foliage
  I was distracted;
and the cricket, will I hear him again
  beneath the green chasuble?
Long fish in the Catholic nave.
  Women with white bellies,
combed hair—Martha, Mary, Magdalen—
  where windowpane meets summer.
  Sun over Golgotha:
  and the spiral knots the pious butcher
  to heaven
  as the bird
to transparent limestone.

  I leave the long breath
  to the wind
for suave flannel
  and for silk.
May your surcingle be mirrored
  in the misted sand,
  guardian of cattle
which trampling the grass
  discover

that you too skilled with harpoons
  are, from crest to crest,
  foiling the storm
as far as arid heaven
  where earth takes up only
a little space in the milk.

Deadlier than the thrust and the blade
  the low dialect
ground between jaws
reduced at last to nothingness
this too long maintained taste
  of hunger and thirst
for the woman here—for the sole
  perfume over there
that archangels breathe.

  So close, the gods.
In us their lips. The vessels
  never graze them.
Governors of suns, planets are
  to them like petals.
But should one lower an eyelash
  toward me or autumn, I then know
  that for all eternity
toward this bloody stock my heart,
  the world flies
like a javelin.

O I say sacred plain
  receive me, receive
my captives—and while our eyes
take on agate strix and moons

to stay fixed forever
on the sacred Mount of Olives
in the abyss—I know—among the oxides
the engines will be engulfed
for on the day of Resurrection
even metals are invited.

All will see then on Jesus' brow
the eglantine blooming
and the sweat spreading out as dew
on the shoulders of ladies,
three, whom I name Ischa
and then Eve and Mary.
And he, the most naked of men,
from deepest Mothers
and Memories exalted
now marrying
the fire to the flame.

I spoke of Nahash
whom the Jews of Toledo have invoked
whom El Greco having crossed Venice
came to the rock to paint
where the Tagus coils
surging each time
from the cup
John carries in his hand
and points to with his finger.

I spoke the serpent,
out of the seas,
erect in the world tree,
vertical, starred with five beams

hidden by pulp in the moisture
  with whom man walks in flame
when he follows on the ladder
  his procession of angels.

  Sword
borne on the milky tongue of the lamb
well you know how to separate the two poles
as well to undouble the troubled current
so that thunder engender on earth
  the grape cluster

  and the ear of grain.

Jerome McGann

Prose

(for Maldoror)

On me pense.
—Rimbaud, a letter to Izambard
To speak is to lie, to live is to collaborate.
—William Burroughs, Nova Express

First of all this was meant to be read by those persons who
by reason of their marginal economic and social
circumstances, would not be able to do so. In fact,
even if these words had been given to them to read, what
I have to say here would certainly mean little to these
people. Therefore you alone, if anyone, will read this
text. So far as I am concerned you will be overhearing
a set of remarks intended for someone else. Nor can I believe
it much matters whether you find all or any of this
significant or not.

One further preliminary
remark since I do not want this statement misconstrued,
to find itself made subject to ambiguities or
double-meanings, auras and the like. There is no time for
that any longer. When it meant to find its way through the faiths
and thicket of the world, poetry has always simply
set its face toward what is plain, toward what is recognized
despite the masters and faith-breakers of the words.

This then
seems true to me: to speak is a lie, to live is to collaborate.

This notorious remark is not universally
true, but it is perfectly true for anyone who, by
virtue of his (or her) social and economic position
in this society, secures the advantages of
the culture at the expense of those who are systematically
deprived of those advantages. Who does not understand
the fate of this supremacy is human deprivation?
That no one could claim personal responsibility
for exploiting any particular person is at
worst one of the blessings of this position and at best
a ridiculous irony. Have you been told that this
is only guilt, that words like these speak the sympathetic
response of a scrupulous conscience? It isn't so, this
is a case where guilt is meaningless, where the little conscience
we cherish now is only understanding with its cruel
conserving vision. Don't look to find much guilt or conscience
here in this poem, search out the stony run of fact where
you have your private grounds for believing whatever you
want. Here "you are not your own," here you will become a part
of the spirit which social mastery entails to the
present age's thrones, dominions, principalities and
powers: on the one hand the exquisite privilege of
guilt, on the other the inescapable guilt of the
privileged.

To speak then is to lie for us, to live like
those words in contradiction, whose only truth lies in a
nakedness—not in what they seem to mean, in what they are
instead: false, unrecognized, obscure as the works and days
of each so-called creative artist who finds himself always
reproduced within the state ideological apparatuses
of today. The same indictment holds, of course, for anyone
working in the regular consciousness industries of
our society—the schools at all levels, the churches,

the various organs of culture. Outside these structures, in the worlds where poverty thrives (all the South Chicagos and Ohio Valleys of our own country, but also in those foreign lands whose ignorance, powerlessness, and deprivation serve to maintain what we regard as our knowledge, strength, and wealth), speech that does not lie is possible, and one may find a way to live without collaborating. But to speak the truth and so to live in this desired way requires that one speak and live at a level where human suffering is deepest and human longing is, therefore, strongest. For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven.

I have heard it said, by people in my own class of course, that conditions of human misery are an inevitable function of human society—that it has always been so and that it always will be so. I have also heard it said, by the same sort of person, that our new system of masters and slaves gives one singular advantage to the slave: hard work and determination will raise a person from poverty or a marginal existence to wealth and success.

Both of these statements (they are made in various forms) exemplify—indeed, they epitomize—what Burroughs meant when he said To speak is to lie. For these statements, while accurate, are false—false in the only way that humanly matters, false as one might say that "my friend proved false to me." Only a poor man can truly say "The poor you have with you always." In any other mouth these words ought never to be tolerated.

No one can live with or by the wisdom of cruelty. And should you ever agree to

pursue success through hard work and determination, at least in this world you never made, you may come at last to gain a prize which will cost you your human life. For it is known that he who will not defend Truth shall be compelled to defend a Lie, that he may be snared & caught & taken.

In Memory of Herzen

> *With these knights . . . scepticism is a form of transition from democracy to liberalism, to that toadying, vile, foul and brutal liberalism which shot down the workers in 1848, restored the shattered thrones and applauded Napoleon III, and which Herzen* cursed, *unable to understand its class nature.*
>
> —V. I. LENIN

If I were you I would begin with hate, where you may be certain of your footing. This is not something you can learn over there, or ever by yourself. But I can help you.

Here in Pasadena you start by coming south across Colorado Blvd., or north beyond Foothill. You are looking for San Marino, or the best parts of Pasadena, or those lovely areas by the arroyo or up near the hills in Altadena. The places where people care about their homes and do all they can for their children's education. This is where you should begin, though it appears, I agree, a most unlikely place. But here if the people are not smiling or talking affably to anyone they meet (yourself included), they will be serious and busy, they will be moving everywhere with evident purpose and self-direction, though they may only be jogging.

Make no mistake, this is where your hate may grow, like the rich bounty of heaven in the Imperial Valley. Are you prepared for the sacrifices you will have to make? Do not come at all if your heart

is not committed to the power of your will. You need to breathe an air of self-determination.

Now look carefully and learn. The faces, do you see it yet? reveal their world. They have found a way to turn every feeling into pleasure, and each emotion turns itself to happiness. Or let us say, this is their conviction, that nothing will be lost, that what is here will grow and change and never die. Their eyes are bright with that belief, and if you should remind them of their faith, their eyes may then go misty, and fill with tears.

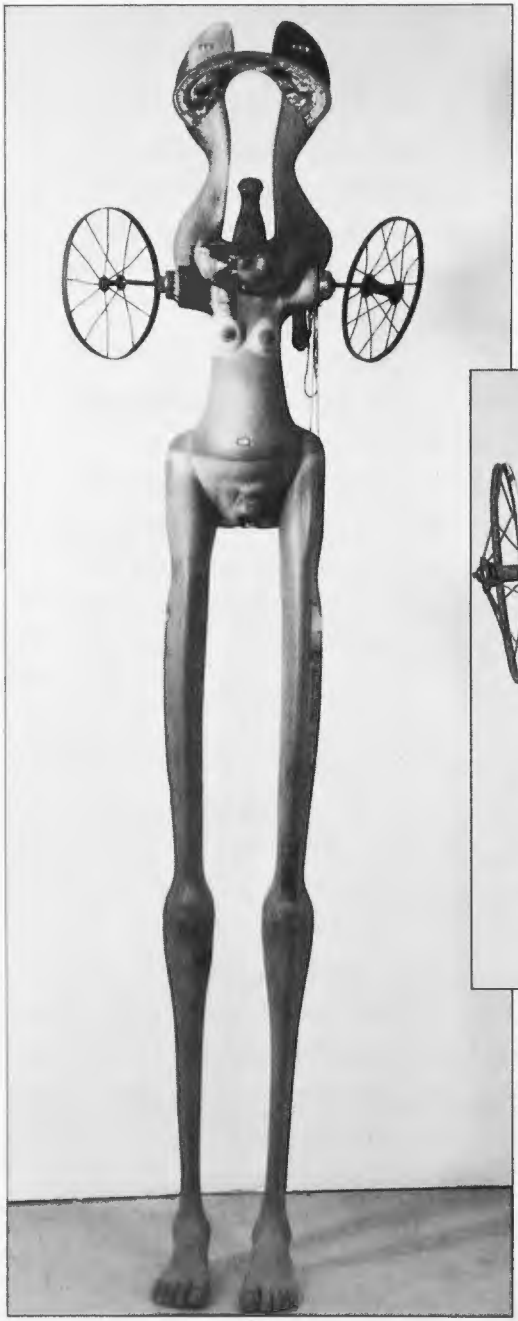
Out of their sympathy, in which you share, our final sufferings are born as paler suffering shall come at last even in these regions of the blessed. Pain that comes and goes but does not change, miseries which cannot be translated to the knowledge we speak, the despair in faces which one day we know will not be beautiful again, or bodies wrecked beyond repair or sentiment, objects of disgust, streets who could imagine walking down or living on—as appearances grow worse, the day begins to close. We go to sleep and dream, vision or nightmare it does not matter, for tomorrow brings back the recurrent therapy of happiness, our morning's first fix of pleasure. Night is gone, and most of all the weariness it closed. When our day begins your suffering, and even mine as well, is born again.

And out of this is also born the beauty of the world, the beauty (can you find it?) of this poem.

But if this talk has made you sad, you either live nearby or you have not begun to live at all.

△

TIMOTHY



Introductory Title
Mixed Media, 102" tall.

WASHINGTON

Induction and Suspicion
Mixed Media, 84" tall.

Photographs courtesy of: Daniel Gouro Associates, Los Angeles.

Clayton Eshleman

Four Poems from Fracture

The Color Rake of Time

I dreamed that all artists were friends,
that we told everything we knew to each other
and that our knowledge was physical,
that we worked in the skull rooms of each other's
genital enclosures, broken fulcrum people
raining within ourselves at high noon,
that we talked in mid-ocean in smashed saint stables
where spars were severe-steady cave-ins,
that at last all of us feasted off of repression and depression—

I dreamed! that the sphinx was not at the end of her twig,
that she was not open to the furnace of the hearth,
that there was no heat without recall,
no vitality without memory, that the slave was merely one
who rowed in a hold without oar-lock . . .

then I heard the color rake of time
scraping the window, and awoke to the face of God
whose childhood is everlasting
whose maturity we struggle to create.

△

Elegy

Vladimir Holan

impacted in the jaw of Prague, its wisdom,
pain. I wondered what it meant to write
only that which is pried out of
what cannot be said by others . . .

"It means these horseflesh blankets,"
Holan replied, "and this Virgin who daily
descends from His Cross to pull out another of
my teeth. My last visitor was Caravaggio
who came bounding in here, the police still on his heels,
from Rome. He knelt by my bedside and we talked,
about, for example, why Hans Bellmer,
in spite of his bloody crinolines,
was never elected pope . . ."

How long ago, I asked—

"It was in the future," Holan said, "on the beach
at Porto Ercole—they will carry my bed, canopy and all,
out by the surf so that I can watch Caravaggio
veer, copulating with his own wounds,
instead of this hag and her orifice
—Orpheus to you—who only truly loved
the first few moments of sunlight
after he led her out . . ."

But those are not real people, I protested,
they're the entangled vinework of your dreams
as you lie here looking forward
arguing that Orpheus did not look back—

yet what else is there to do in an empty cathedral

and I began to look around,
the high vaulted walls were hung with corpses hanging by their
hair;
Between Holan's bed and the walls
was the distance
between expecting everything and having no faith . . .

"We who do believe," Holan read my mind, "are always expecting
nothing to come, not that nothing which is a lack,
but nothing as a power, life's twin,
Our Caravaggio of the Shadows, an equal match
for the fugitive Caravaggio with his blackened soles.
That painter so darkened the Christian scene
that light became the glare of shattered desire
and the rich a darker shade of the poor.
How closely his attempt to cave in Christianity
so that its shackles would gleam through
the purple of the human hunger for death's divinity
was bound to the incident itself:
'He quarrelled with Ranuccio Tomassoni over a game of tennis,
and they beat each other with the rackets,
then he drew his weapon and killed the youth and was himself
wounded. He fled from Rome without money, under pursuit,
and took refuge in—' "
and here I heard "—the poetry of Vladimir Holan."

So you do not have to be carried to Porto Ercole,
that Caravaggio stumbling about in sulfuric heat
is in the bag of your poet's heart,
is what gives it grotesque life,
its unceasing disassociative thumping,

what provokes me here, in spite of your wife's request
that I not come in . . .

"But you've come in death," Holan smiled,
"and in your own invention of where you would find me.
I know that you tried to visit me twice in Prague.
I was so ashamed for people I did not know to see
not only my idiot daughter but the squalor in which we lived.
As for Caravaggio, I never thought much about him
until I became very ill—then his beheadings
began to strike me as a man trying to screw off his own lid
so that the hands of little children might poke about
in what had fermented in him so long—in fact
his brutality so appalled me, I began to think
that he was driven by my dread of violence
which you perceived by hanging this place
with the souls of so many of my countrymen . . .
What does strike me as fairly certain is
that the soul is timeless and multiple in its singleness . . .
as we've been talking I've kept thinking of the buttocks
of a young woman who keeps walking in place away from me,
of that joke about her ass jumping like two cats
fighting in a sack, so perhaps the left one's Caravaggio,
the right one me, or any two dead
blowing off soul in the alchemical glasswork of art,
or my death reaching what lives in you of me."

As he was speaking, his canopied bed became an animal mouth,
open, in which Holan, its single fang, was obliquely
embedded. Snow drifted through the beast head
as if we were out in the Old Jewish Cemetery
and the Virgin too descended, to reach way in for Holan with
forceps, and begin to tug. I could hear him give

vista opening from the height of Brahms' First,
fog skeletonizing amidst the black
hypodermics of medieval Prague,
gape of a crematorium in the rectum of war
singing at the vintage of everyone's
teeth in a pile, or all things compost
in the thought: spring has gone out of the world.

△

Manticore Vortex

This will be, then, my primal scene:
the Rashomon Gate of the American poem,
a kind of panopticon in which viewpoint upon viewpoint,
shafts of late afternoon light, slant through
this ruined tower at the western edge of civilization—
and the muse upon which the self of the poem is begotten
is none other than that hair-pulling hag,
that wig maker, fashioning the poem's destiny
out of what she can draw from the dead.

There is a cave below this gate,
the midwestern basement where Sylvia Likens is on view,
where pledge larvae are huddled
during the nights of a Hell Week that is furnace and father,
a dead washing machine, the wringer
one was cranked through so as to learn octopus sleight of hand,
the various dodges of the nascent self as it tiptoes around
the terror of the dream that tells it it is religious
because it not only entwines its mother
but feeds on her underarm fat while she is dying.

The self is an active cannibalism of its own matrix
and the co-producer of its birth.
To the visitor it would appear as if there were only
a large bolted screw in this basement floor,
but there is Aztec density here.
A pubescent boil has been transformed into a crystal ball
through which the poem sees the guardian rattler
dreaming at the Amerindian stratum of the world.

In the vortex of the whirlpool below,
animals are separating and recombining with men—
the archetypal grotesque is constant,
from Lascaux to Disneyland, intersected by Rabelais,
by Belsen, by gargoyles
poised for eternity on the periphery of the holy,
that periphery is the furrow in which
the crossbreeding of the marvelous takes place
but turn it, like a prism, a few degrees in your hand
and the gargoyles are the damned of any century,
turn it back the other way and they recede into a cave,
nothing more than sockets observing us.

And who are we?
A holding pattern between heaven and hell?
Gaudi bends in a roller rink centripetally seeking God?

O pillbox
in which I find all the space I am not taking up
is taken up by you, we
completely filling the space
yet encased

it was into this core

we fell, two drops ceaselessly
seeking to reamoebize

three billion years of single-celled life

Such is my lust for merger
on the rubberband of pendulum flitting

nicked
periplus
of that oldest beauty:
    the slow running diaspore of burning semen
incense to the schizophrenic fissure

        ape eye to human eye

            me to you.

△

Certification

We hereby certify that there are too many bomb craters
    in El Salvador, that more blood is needed for these,
    North American blood milling with Wheaties, with all
    the Jack Armstrong we can press into bright red bullets,
that there are too many peasant children's heads on village
    posts that look like boiled octopuses; more blood is
    therefore needed for the swimmingpools of the wealthy
for diningroom tables made of blood
for blood automobiles
finally for blood grass and blood ground,

blood
ground into the very air
a kind of mincemeat of blood,
blood
as a new informing essence to replace the metaphor of blood

an essence to pack into the rifle of a 15 year old—

is he a soldier on whose puberty bridge no one will ever stand?

That desolate pretty bridge,
a Chinese bridge of sorts,
over pool water in which lay like lilies
all the lovely terrors of puberty.
As we drop to our knees on that bridge
we do not know that we are deep in fantasy—
we only know we are frightened
by these weird stalks growing up through our feet,
the palms of our feet, for in puberty our feet
are like hands, we stalk about, our head in our groin,
marvelous beasts of transformation,
whose mouths therefore induct
a certain stuff of the ground
the child and adult noses have lost.

In puberty, if we experience one, we induct the life of the snake.
The lives of extinct non-flying birds.
Our ears fill with the ringing of our mother's periods.
We listen to the great blood radio of her lap.
We grasp something about pain,
about compassion, this radio picks up the Neanderthal
wave-length of *caring*.
We may go on to become cheats,

slobs, failures, even killers—
but if we suffer
our puberty we do not become steel
nor have the nervelessness to package blood.

•

Let us give more blood for them to play with, to box with,
boxes of blood gloves for the pubertyvoid young army husband
to wear
as he puts out a baby's eyes so that when he comes home at dusk
he can peel off his North American supporters and play with his
own baby,
let us offer him blood partitions, factories to produce a
homogeneous world.

•

And if we did not send this certified blood?
Would there be pus? Knee-deep swamps of pus
tilting through the structure of El Salvadorian life,
a pus that one day
might scab over.

What does a father feel picking the shrapnel
out of his one hour old infant's thighs?
I will try to say: he feels with the force of rock
against steel, his body twangs with a hatred
so vegetal it cannot yet get beyond his shoulders.
In the grief and numbness mounting to his eyes
a bayonet child is being conceived who shall wear for a head
the shredded flag of no one's salvation.

22 January, 1983

Δ

Martin Anderson

Giorgionesque

Woven through the flesh
this gold dust
this thread In the black
folds of the cypress
its filaments spin They
are pulled through
a white dusk
into this glistening rain this
vermilion the 'ground
of the flesh' that is breathing
under the lip of
the sarcophagus into
our name

Some phrases are taken from Pater's 'The Renaissance.'
The quote is from Ruskin.

Seurat's "Port-en-Bessin, The Outer Harbour at Low Tide"

Silence

flat

ened encomium

flow

of escutcheon

stone latitudes

emptying

themselves evacuated

streets the load

ed horizontal

△

Three Poems

Fear Not

Will Dallas grow, or wither?
  said the paper.
"Let the bastards freeze in the dark."

    dead or alive?
    knocking at the stone door.

"Goat ropers need love too."

      embracing more than "being"
      the stone door knocks back.

Two women masturbate a corpse,
                in clay,
One holds his chin—

The Fox-girls switch from
    human to fox-form
    right during the party!
        one man
who was doing cunnilingus on his friend,
    now finds a mouth
    of fur.
The saké bottles clatter down.

and daylight; all's well,
just a little sore—

Who's there?
No one who

△

Hers

Hers was not a
sheath.
it was
a
quiver.

△

Uluru Wild Fig Song

1

Soft earth turns straight up
curls out and away from its base
hard and red—a dome—five miles around
Ayers Rock, Uluru,

we push through grasses, vines, bushes
along the damp earth wash-off watershed margin
where vertical rock dives
into level sand,

Clustering chittering zebra finches on the
bone-white twigs,
red-eyed pink-foot little dove,

push on, into caves of overhangs,
painted red circles in circles,
black splayed-out human bodies,
painted lizards, wavy lines.

skip across sandy peels of clean bent bedrock
stop for lunch and there's a native fig tree
heavy-clustered, many ripe:
someone must have sat here, shat here
long ago.

2

Sit in the dust
take the clothes off. feel it on the skin
lay down. roll around
run sand through your hair.
nap an hour

bird calls through dreams.
now
you're clean.

sitting on red sand ground with a dog.
breeze blowing, full moon,
women singing over there—
men clapping sticks and singing here

eating meaty bone,
hold the dog off with one foot

stickers & prickles in the sand—

clacking the boomerang beat,
a long walk
singing the land.

3

naked but decorated,
scarred.
white ash white clay,
scars on the chest.
lines of scars on the loin.
the scars: the gate,
the path, the seal,
the proof.

white-barred birds under the dark sky.

4

singing and drumming at the school
a blond-haired black skinned girl
watching and same time teasing a friend
dress half untied, naked beneath,
young breasts like the *mulpu*
mushroom,
swelling up through sand.

stiff wind close to the ground.

trash lodged in the spinifex, the fence,
the bottles, broken cars.

5

Sit down in the sand
skin to the ground.
a thousand miles of open gritty land

white cockatoo on a salt pan

hard wild fig on the tongue.

this wild fig song.

Uluru, Amata, Fregon,
Papunya, Ilpili.
Austral. *Fall of 40081*

Δ

Five Letters from Rodez

Selected and Translated from the French by Norman Glass

". . . It doesn't matter if you have no 'finished' texts but only notes at hand. Would you please send me these notes? I know that notes written by you, whatever they contain, reveal more about the truth than the most perfect works of other writers. . . .

You are one of the last men who has dared to descend into the depths, and you have thus encountered again the eternal terror of origins. The malediction that crushes this world has grown so heavy and man has become so forgetful that there are no longer even any poètes maudits *today to acknowledge this evil, to acknowledge it, that is to say to denounce it by emphasizing it."*

— ARTHUR ADAMOV, in a letter to Antonin Artaud.

To Jean Paulhan

Rodez, 16 February 1945

Dearest friend,

Thank you for your card with its confirmation of your immense affection for me. Regarding the project to which you refer, thereby revealing all your interest in me, I informed you about two years ago that Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras had been bought by a young publisher with a number of supplementary pages which I had written here. But this publisher, Robert Godet (64 Rue Lecomte du Noüy), is

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I have provided a section of Notes at the end of these letters. For the sake of unobstructed reading I have not indicated them by numerals in the text. —N.G.

in London now and I don't know what has become of his publishing project since I have no news of him and I don't have his new address. Moreover there is a book that I can not allow to reappear among my published works: *Héliogabale*, it infuriates me every time I reread it because I believe one can not be further off the point and in a falser, more lying and more erroneous state of mind than in this book. It does not stop pleading for the unity of God but only in order to attribute it to a libertarian and egoistic natural force while in fact the Unknowable is that warm Virgin force of the heart which *nobody* has ever *really* wanted to admit because it is christ and because it is cross. And he who is christ is Somebody. And if nobody has ever wanted to admit it everybody has always *profited* from it in the recesses of their consciousness and his believers first of all.*

During the last eight years I have often plunged into the gloomy depths and my ideas on Religion have kept up with my ideas on the ego and on the soul and I see that men no longer recognize their souls and that as for the ego they no longer know what it is. Now, never has man's inherent and personal ego been attacked, distorted and misrepresented the way it is at the present moment. Don't worry, I hate sermons. I want the things of the eternal infinite to be presented to human consciousness bearing the same quality of material necessity and of staunch authenticity as the gestures of a sacred spectacle. —With regard to the ego I shall not speak as a hypocrite, a preacher or an Initiate but as the martyr of the gloom into which the destiny of living has plunged me. —I know that the ego weeps for itself in its dreams and can no longer aspire, for the sake of the continuity of its principle and of its being, to that duration which it enjoyed a few centuries ago by the notion of the immortal soul. This means that without the body which preserves the personal continuity of impressions human beings would be more changeable than the spectacle of nature which varies from mountain to sea and from iceberg to forest.

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*On the other hand I definitely do want the Voyage to be published and if you could do something for that! The new pages are bound to please you.

The soul is the eternal foundation of a principle which the irrepressible hate of things has degraded and deteriorated. It is indeed infinitely easier to love than to hate, to give than to withhold, to ignore the captivating appeal of things than to surrender in the internal beatitude of ecstasy to the whims of infernal cupidity. I don't say that it is finer, more moral, nobler, though certainly it is, but I do say that it is easier and simpler, and that it is evil, stupidity, hate, egoism, rapacity, impurity and perversity that are difficult and complicated. Infinitely less suffering and pain are required in order to be good than to be wicked. This arises from deformation, and from the insidious transfer of a principle with the result that whatever still believes itself to be the being is really no longer it while the ego in living does not realize that it is its own vampire which holds the place which it no longer has. The double of the theater is life, but the double of ego and of being is an imperceptible essence which precisely rejects theater and drama and persuades a human being to live only according to the unconscious principle of effigies, ready-cast and ready-made moral statues, that is to say without struggling with the mysteries of his mind. He is convinced that he thinks and wills and does not perceive that it is *the other* that thinks, without even asking for his opinion or for his choice. And he believes it is himself because at this moment of decision and choice he felt unprecedentedly *distinct* in his physical being, dense and as it were *inwardly painted*, like the aroma of an ancient painting which attempts to rise within him in order to affirm him limb by limb from the age of puberty onward; but all that is the enemy; it is *the other* since the ego is the unmanifested, the void, *the dramatic abandonment of things which enables the soul and not the body to come*. I am writing a book in order to prove it. There will be no lack of examples.

All the most affectionate thoughts of my heart for you and Germaine Paulhan.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

Excuse the handwriting and the style of this letter, I have been in bed for eight days with bronchitis and I have had a high fever.

To Doctor Jean Dequeker

Rodez, 6 April 1945

Dearest friend,

I have a profusion of thoughts to tell you, and I am always horrified to see how exterior circumstances prevent me and how difficult it is for two friends to find in the words which they speak to each other the internal diapason of their hearts. —I have conceived an extraordinary world where the heart can not require more than the mind, that is to say than desire, because it has become, as it was before its birth, the criterion and the pattern for the mind and its desires. —The body (which is heart) can not be body if it has never suffered all the pain of the mind with its eternal ambivalence: am I the mind of a body or the body of my mind, and what am I, I who think out this debate between body and mind? Am I a body or a mind. —There is an orthodoxy which believes in the eternal existence of a person situated between body and mind and which uses both of them as symbols of its ambivalent capacity. Myself I believe that before being somebody it is necessary first of all to be nobody, and I do not believe in the Person of God and I do not want the Person of God. There is a state without a person or God which is the inborn suffering of a cross which is not the being of a cross but its quartering power, without any definition made by a mind, a person or a cross. The Eternals lost life because they did not understand this internal reduction of power which abolishes even the power and the dream of eternity before this force of Will which is so simple that it no longer even sees the suffering it causes, nor does it realize, on the cross which it still intentionally is,

that it is the eternal being who is the quartered one.

God the dream missed the mind of the body because he feared that point of death where suffering became obscene, and because he wanted to get away from his body instead of rushing into his body in order to free it from all the obscene, which is never anything except the *profuse* dream of suffering and death.

To hit the dream of the body when one is already inside as if in the fluid corpse of the eternities is to know how to die to the corpse through dying to the idea of oneself dead. This is an atrocious and heroic virginity. Only the idea of intrinsic virginity saves one from oneself, from death and from God. This means that in order to be the body which wanted to detach itself from the desire of having a body, it was necessary at first to detach oneself from the dream and from the image of one's body, but it does not suffice to detach oneself from it in mind one must detach oneself from it in body, that is to say that the body of one's detachment is a body which serves to strike the body one dreams, and this took place in fact through the force of the interior chastity of a Cross before its own thought, and the dream of its own thought, were it the image of the Holy Virgin, the Holy Virgin of its thought.

I wrote a short poem one day which concluded

> It was a Virgin without body or sex
> and of whom the mind alone can profit.

And I did not realize to what extent this poem was perverse. Since to entrust the idea of the Virgin to the mind, and to entrust it at first, and then to entrust it without body is to make the idea automatically give birth to sex. What can the mind of an idea do except intrude in it and wallow in and around it, for the mind has never been anything except the vast elongation of a body, and the body is the infinitesimal and inaccessible atom of the principle of all irreducibility and this principle can not be mind since it is only an invisible point and neither thinks nor moves, but it is body at first indeed and certainly it is from the body that the mind and not the mind-of-the-body emer-

ges. This means that before being born in person one had at first to merit being body through the addition of the invisible aspects of the body; and all that which is desire or mind, be it God or the Holy Ghost, can only disappear before the hate of the body which is all that which has suffered in man and deserved to be a man one day, whereas the mind has never deserved it, for in order to be conscious thought the reduction of the bodies had to be suffered.

Thus in order for the heart finally to desire the internal diapason of the soul, and in order for men who have met to realize themselves in the way determined by their souls each of them must have experienced the Virgin nature of his body. —I mean the body of the beginning of the soul, which is to be born to life *in* life. For at each lived moment we precede our own birth like Virgins before our ego. —But if this idea of interior Virginity is not applied to the exterior of the body, at every moment of its daily life and in fact, then we shall miss our soul also in fact. It will die in us and we shall no longer be present before ourselves and others except as corpses. If I were not absolutely chaste with all the worlds of pain I bear and of which the worst is sexuality I would long ago have lost the ability to write or speak. Sexuality is the essential burden of the ego man and as long as all men fail in their hearts to renounce it no change will be possible in the life of the world. To have children nowadays and in the body we have is a crime. This is the basis of the Cathar doctrine but it is mine, *integrally.* Men with their anarchy, their perversion, their stupidity and their wars have never suffered except from this *sin* and from not having resolved *in their bodies* to renounce it. The whole world is gradually going toward chaos and has never wanted and even today still doesn't want to admit it, and deludes itself with a dream of peace which it will enjoy in fact only when it has physically earned it, by renouncing sexual obsession. And this whole world, I say, will soon be destroyed. I don't have to tell you or to hide from you any longer that this idea and this Apocalyptic Will are responsible for my having been put away for 8 years and accused of delirium and sickness. But for me at present the sick are those who use their sexuality without seeing that it is the

cause of all sickness, infection or delirium and that men will be cured of their folly and delirium only when they renounce the principle of their inmost sexuality. —There we have the great Cathar idea which the world has never accepted. —I still have much to tell you about this subject but in short I shall not believe in peace as long as men fail to realize that the time has come for them to understand that the true cause of all their wars, their hate, their famine, their misery is everybody's sexual impiety with everybody else's body and soul.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

To Jean Paulhan

Rodez, 9 September 1945

Dearest friend,

You asked me for a book, I am going to write you a letter. I don't know if it will be a long one since I've just begun it, but I would like it to be published since I'm writing it as a poem which is dedicated specially to you. —We have shared many thoughts during the last eight years without my seeing you, and we have often spoken through distance and space, and your souls, yours and Jeanne Paulhan's, have replied fluidly to me in the atmosphere and apparently at some meters from me in the waves coming from my belly, since everything comes from sexuality which is heart; together we have discussed many problems in this way, and I have taken down from you and Jeanne Paulhan several words of heart, particular ones which you have not repeated in your letters, not because your letters lack heart—on the contrary they abound with it but the heart does not have the same nature here that it has had on all the occasions when we have spoken privately to each other through space and *in time*—but because one

has wickedly forced you to forget those words of heart, in order to wickedly force you to forget that the soul speaks in the whole of space, and that the souls of those who have loved each other answer each other through the spaces as yours and Jeanne Paulhan's answered me this morning Sunday 10 September at approximately ten o'clock. —I had posed myself the problem of the soul's sickness, the soul sick of being in a false body and I asked myself where had this soul originally begun its beginning and who had put it into this false body, where we are the ancient slaves of an ego, which never had an ego, except to assert ours before us, by making use of our body losses, in those somber hours of being, when we feel we are losing body since to live is to lose one's body. And thus we proceed toward the grave, through old age, sickness, death, instead of going toward the eternal insurrection soul body, and body in body through soul, soul on soul as body on body. The soul is body, and the body is soul too, though not in the limitable way of the body, but in the unlimited way of the soul, which does not exceed its infinite since it is all this infinite which itself always exceeds itself, not in transcending the infinite but in tumulizing, as if by tumulus of tombs, I say *tumulizing* this infinite. To tuft, to guffaw until one's fat shakes, and I'm not alluding to fatty, the way one says Look at that fat lump of a man, when referring to an outrageously obese man trying to walk without wobbling, to tuft, to guffaw, to tumulize are the operations through which the body walks, the unfathomable soul of this body which guffaws toward still more body, in the end gains being a being, being soul in all its body, and its body is no longer only soul, because it is the soul which is the body. The body ascends since it certainly is soul, but the soul descends because it is body, and what is to ascend for the body is to descend for the soul, to descend body into infinite hell, the soul full, stuffed to bursting with body must now ascend since it is full, but in order to dig up all the tumuli of beings, with which to ascend again one day.

It was a similar problem, the basis of this problem which I was dis-

cussing with myself this morning when I saw you breathing and living, when I was trying to understand where the being of living had taken the wherewithal to breathe, and in what way it had taken it. For I believe that it was a void which needed to be full, and used this need for fullness, this sexual need for fullness in order to fill up all the voids of the void, but in a way which is yet to be understood with regard to a being neither void nor even the void of its fullness.

One day in one of your books you said something I have never forgotten, a phrase which made me love you when I read it even before knowing you, I think it was in 1920: ". . . but who would not gain from being sick," for the problem I was discussing within me was that of living sickly when one believes oneself to be healthy, and of understanding that sickness is the basis of health. I was thinking of you then yesterday morning and I felt my heart become a spherical sex, ascend and hover over the penis, like a suspended force torn away from it. —For the penis had life in the heart, and the heart slept. It slept because it was being, and because being sufficed it. For to sleep is not to slumber, but to live on the side of the dream, and not like a sleeper giving off the compiled mucus of the dream, but like a fiend seeking itself, contrary to any consciousness of wakefulness, in that sort of terebrant immanence, in that space of unfathomable immanence where our unconscious is woven. —And I am not speaking of a separate diabolical fiend but of a furious fiend of self in this sleeping being, more alive than an awake being, because it is the being living. A man who lives his life has never lived himself, has never lived his self, like a fire which lives an entire body in the integral expanse of the body, by dint of consuming this body, a man does not live all his self at every minute of his body, in an absolute space of body, sometimes he is knee and sometimes foot, sometimes occiput and sometimes ear, sometimes lung and sometimes liver, sometimes membrane and sometimes uterus, sometimes anus and sometimes nose, sometimes penis and sometimes heart, sometimes saliva and sometimes urine, sometimes food and sometimes sperm, sometimes

excrement and sometimes idea, I mean that whatever is the ego or the self is not centered on only one perception, and that the ego is no longer whole because it is dispersed in the body whereas the body should be gathered together to itself in integral sensorial equality and should constitute an integral perception. —For man is not only *scattered* in his body, he is scattered in the exterior of things, like a forgotten death of his body, and he swims around his body because he has forgotten his body and because his body has forgotten the self, and the man who does not live all his self commits at every moment the mistake of believing himself to be this self, mind, idea, conception, notion, which floats in a point of the body, instead of being his body himself and at every moment all his body. —For it is not a question of exhausting all one's self, in a single exertion, under the pretext of living all, —but of descending to the bottom of all this and of bringing back the self from there, in order to reach this computation of body where the uterine soul of the being gathers together in all the body, in order to create its stature from it, and no longer to place its stature either outside or inside the stature of the body, but in the uterine stature of the soul which is the guffawing being of the body.

It suddenly occurs to me that similar ideas can be found in the *Tarakhyan*, but I have never read the *Tarakhyan* and I read only a few random pages of the Upanishads in 1934, I'm not acquainted with the books of India or Tibet, I hardly glanced at the Popol-Vuh, one day at the National Library, the ideas I have I discover them, by suffering them myself, little by little and step by step, I write only what I have suffered measure by measure of body, and point by point in all my body, I have never found what I write except through agony, agony of my body's mental and moral faculties, for when Jeanne Paulhan suffers it is she Jeanne Paulhan who suffers and nobody but she in her pain and nobody else would be able to describe it, and when I write about my extreme pain I resent the fact that the *Tarakhyan* without having suffered its spasms anticipated my suffering in order to distil knowledge from it which Vishnu the spirit has

used in order to keep beings in life. For such is my predicament, to have suffered, myself, a knowledge from which everybody since I was born has persisted in extracting writings. For I am a source of life that has been deprived of its constituent force: opium and food, that has been deprived and underfed so that it will be compelled to give perpetually the maximum without receiving anything even the minimum while the maximum of absolute satisfaction is subsequently reserved for everybody else, and this is why this force has been imprisoned, enslaved, poisoned, intoxicated, put into a coma for 8 years so that nothing of what could aid it to live, I mean nothing of what comes out of it be put exclusively to its daily profit and thereby saved from those who have plotted to profit from it. Like a ghost becoming a body one day in order to go out and live and from whom this body is eventually removed: remain a ghost, it is told, the body you have made for yourself in order to live has always belonged to us, we can not leave you this body, to do so would rob us of gratification, the pleasure of enjoying your body too, and you will not deprive us of this pleasure, if we deprive you of your ego. —There you have the appalling situation in which I flounder and which I try to make you understand every time I see you. I signalled it to you yesterday morning, but signs made from a distance are forgotten and I sincerely hope that this letter reminds you that the world continues only because of my losses of marrow and sperm, and that men have balefully conspired to keep me in this state of loss by depriving me of everything that could restore my strength, and by underfeeding me for years in order to take everything I lose from me. The foundation of the body is sexual, you know it, but it is not well enough known that sexuality is the basis of breathing, because it is the soul of the bones of the dead, and that the heart has been extracted from sexuality in order to make being, while the heart itself, through the distance between it and the genitals, constitutes a dimension of being, while dimension, distance and being should have remained in sexuality. This exteriorization of the heart created the illusory world, this world propped up by an

illusory being which prevents us from breathing.

This pectoral heart is a crime which dates back to long before Jesus-christ, and this crime is the disequilibration of a being, a being which was not *being*, that is to say come out of the ego, unfolded from self and by self, spread out in all the spaces, instead of being blocked up in self, an immeasurable self because it is full of all its self. Lucifer's crime against god was his desire to extend his being, instead of letting it remain forever unmeasured in its unfathomable volume of being.

This is the problem which I tried yesterday morning Sunday partially to solve before you, by making the heart reenter the bar, the immeasurable bar of the penis which is not reckoned in centimeters but in soul of density. The penis was a measure of love which beat all alone formerly, and the heart was torn away from the bar in order to suffocate and to adjust the bar and to give it a being which was not a loving being, since its heart was displaced, but a rapacious being, marked by self-preservation outside of being so that it would never have anything to give. For being gives but man takes and keeps everything he takes and man today is no longer a being, for being was based on love and man killed love and his being in the initial sex of god in order to have nothing to give to god, and to keep god in the midst of himself intending to take from him all that constitutes god.

I don't know the origins of Parkinson's disease but I believe we suffer from it in our being because man has overthrown god. It is a lack of god and men have made the souls that are faithful to god suffer the torture coming from this privation in order to separate them from god. —If I were not interned here and if I had all that was necessary I believe I would have been able to do everything to free Jeanne Paulhan of pain, but here there are so many beings who disturb me when I work, few nearby but many afar, that I really can no longer do anything.

I have now told you enough about the problem for you to agree with me that this abominable and criminal world should be com-

pletely destroyed and for you to understand the war I intend to wage against the magicians and sorcerers of Tibet who keep us in bondage.

To you with all my heart.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

I would definitely like you to publish this letter.

To Pablo Picasso

(Draft of a letter)

Rodez, 27 February 1946

As soft as flesh but sharply centered, raised high like the prow of a ship from which the mantila hangs like a veil; it is this eye bored into the stonework of ripe flesh, ripe, shaded like the bloom of a peach, barely a shadow and not even bloom but like the shadow of a red brick making one forget the flesh in the allusive wall.

This black clot eye in the A of the space, a thoughtful A, suspended, a black point fixed between a being's purposeful soul and the painter's creative hand which has masterfully placed it in the square of a form. This eye lives, it lives its own life in the angle A, but through the perfect place where, on the obtuse surface of the face, it asks a question. This square of face without mouth with an eye is what one first sees in this painting and it requires some time in order to perceive that the same head has a face lower down, that of another woman, the same but turned the other way. The eyelid of her lowered eye is ripe fruit falling, shadow on slumber, and she dreams in the barely perceptible mysterious malice of her eye. —Is she sleeping. Is she dreaming. One does not know. This painting is an aroma whose soul will not emerge since between the two sides of the head is the hook of an old light, an old phosphorescent light like a two-way

question mark.

The double hook of this two-way ear shines there like a cat's magnetic velvet fur and resembles a minor question which is also an affirmation. What does it affirm, what does it ask? That is the painter's mystery and I believe it will never be revealed. For all great paintings keep their secret, and whoever seeks to know more about the painting than the painter chose to reveal is a disgusting criminal.

This painting, Pablo Picasso, is simple like the void and in it are memories, yours, and questions. It is quite simple and contains nothing. On the one hand it is austere and mythical, on the other hand an unsuspected and barely suspecting poem under the latanias. —But there is this ear which speaks, there is this poised little ear in the bareness, this unctious ashen ear where the unctious is stopped and apparently restrained in the dryness of the ashes by the blinking of the bordering light which borders it and which by lighting it up folds it up.

siok en siok en
terensi tereci
siok e siok en
terensir ki
yiork e yiork e
terenki riki
yiork e yiork
e tereski

Which means, Pablo Picasso, that after so many mythical battles which have supplied stylized heads of soothsayers on preserved or lost vases, after so many bodies of hanged beings on the walls of Etruscan buildings, or in the parietal uterine caverns of the tombs, painted like a dead man's bone there remains,

pas ta safer dezi traba
pas memumka narida

testimony, supreme consciousness, dust of the vanished,

york o belli tafer raki
york o belli taferti

Today marks the advent of a painter who has transfered to a simple painting the 2 faces of the eternal female and under the mantila of the hair ornament he has put, as if at the end of the road of art, these two enigmatic hooks of ears like a subjacent hieroglyph.

And I believe, Pablo Picasso, that the soul, the old bony tooth of the soul will support this hieroglyph.

yo tertri negeta
egete etertri trena

To Monsieur Pierre Bousquet

Rodez, 16 May 1946

Dear sir and friend,

Having been *deported* from Ireland, interned at Le Havre, transfered from Le Havre to Rouen, from Rouen to the Sainte-Anne insane asylum in Paris, from the Sainte-Ann insane asylum in Paris to the insane asylum at Ville-Evrard in the department of the Seine to the insane asylum at Rodez, I know what deportations are, for medicine is known through pain and whoever alleviates pain must first have suffered it, and I agree to speak to you about your deportation to Germany in 1942, as you have in fact asked me to do, only because my situation resembles yours in being a *state* of deportation. To be deported is an event indeed and a state which I shall not examine medically or scientifically because I hate medicine as much as science, but about which I can speak to you as somebody who has suffered it for a long time and, I shall venture to say, meticulously. Meticulously

means that I have been forced like you to experience the whole agony of deportation: *deported* I have been interned into the bargain and I have also had time in fact during years of straw mattresses and of cells, lying on straw mattresses in cells, to think about my situation as a transplanted person and an exile. —In short, dear Mr. Pierre Bousquet, we have a body: a father and a mother were given to us all, given, I mean *assigned*, but we really *don't remember* it. A child's memories generally begin around 18 months or 2 years, and *before* we don't know where we were. As for me, my first *official* memories begin at 18 months, if I say where I was before and that I know it too through memory, I shall be treated as a madman again because my personal memories do not coincide with those of my civil status, for the children that society makes are not those that nature makes. But let us change the subject. —So then, you, Mr. Pierre Bousquet, you always thought you were called Mr. Pierre Bousquet and it was as Pierre Bousquet in time and because you were called Pierre Bousquet, so you rose up one day from nothingness into France among a family of French people; now, France having been at war and having been conquered, you were obliged one day to submit unprotestingly to measures for deportation taken against all the young people of your age after the end of the last war, under the dissolute government of Vichy. —You had no part in the bickering between Daladier and Hitler, but the person responsible for your deportation having been ousted as a coward, his successor Pierre Laval, who was his equal in treason and cowardice, undertook to bind your hands, at the conqueror's orders. Had you been conquered then yourself, no, you were too young, but it was you who had to pay the price for the rout of the French soldiers who preferred to get kicked in the ass rather than to fight, as sacrosanct duty obliged them to do. —But perhaps they too had decided it was not their duty to continue fighting rigged out in blinders by the Daladier government intent on getting them directly to the charnel house. Whatever the reason you were seized from your home one day not by the force of the tempest, the mistral, tornados,

a squall, an *electric* storm or a strong south wind, but by that horrible nameless force which is always characterized by the mean faces of the shabby people who represent it and who function only because they are ordered or hired to do so, a force which only comes from the one-sided decision of a number of coniving mobsters who represent the government, the police, the administration, and in your case the bankruptcy of any army. —To be brutally taken away from one's country in order to be transplanted to another, the way a tree is transplanted in order to prevent rot, is atrocious, and it is equally atrocious to be brutally, abruptly and officially deprived of a home. A diver who loses the axis of a landscape and a fragment of his body in the landscape, as if he suddenly saw his body pass by in the countryside like the roller of a turning kaleidoscope. That is an image, a stylist's metaphor but it reveals a monstrous and insulting reality: the fact that we are not the masters of our bodies. —Our father-mother disposes of them for school, when the administration does not dispose of them for the children's convict-prisons or the professional reform schools, and society for the prisons and the insane asylums; society then disposes of them for the military service health inspection, the priests for the "last sacrament" and the extreme unction of the coffin; and society disposes of them for war while it remains behind to make deals on the black market. And the Vichy government sells for infinitely more than 30 deniers infinite thousands of young men's bodies, to serve as serfs on foreign soil. —But for me, Mr. Pierre Bousquet, the horror of it lies neither in the transplantation nor even in not being one's own master but in the unusual power of this nameless thing which on the surface but only on the surface is called society, government, police, administration and against which historically speaking even recourse to the force of revolution has failed. For revolutions have vanished, but society, government police, administration, schools, I mean the transmission and transfer of beliefs through the *totems* of education, ***have always remained intact.***

And one could believe there is nothing to do.

The day of your deportation to Germany, in the anguish of being taken away from home and transported to an unknown destination, you were *surrounded*. One can say passed from hand to hand by men who, for the share of the cake they were getting at that moment, represented this undefinable power.

The sudden arrival of the police who sit down in front of one just like that in a café is something I have experienced, but that people in the government's pay fix an appointment for a certain hour, on a certain day, at a certain place, in order to take one away with them to Germany, is one of the immoral *obligations*, one of those constraints, one of those soothing oppressive constraints against which nothing can be done.

And one may well wonder how that happens.

For in the foreground everything seems to occur without any fuss and *at first* one is not treated badly. The measures taken against one may be extremely abject, but if one submits docilely and sweetly one can hope to enjoy a sort of *commutation* of one's penalty, in fact if one adopts the right attitude, the penalty, like an electric commutator switched off in the night of hate, may even change its nature. It is thus that the victims of rape calm the spirit of rape by assenting in all their limbs by offering themselves to the housebreaker's gluttony. And does not deportation imply rape, the entry by gentle housebreaking (gentle at first) of a horde of foreign bodies into one's own body, firstly those of the treacherous police who send one abroad, then those of all the black market dealers who lead one away and force one abroad, and finally, abroad, the bodies of foreign men as a rule.

With regard to us as individuals I have always wondered what has made us submit throughout history to this sort of unarmed coercion, for our submission prevents us from protesting on the spot as soon as the social, administrative or political apparatus is set in motion. —Revolts break out everywhere of course, but the old framework always

returns; apparently revolt is only tolerated with a view to readjusting the framework,while it is the framework itself, society which must be done away with so that people can live in peace. Admittedly, against us society can use force, but the latter actually originates in our own unanimous adherence to the force of society, and it is not a fact, but an idea. —It is a simple, false idea of our bodies which has been oppressing us for an extremely long time, and what are we waiting for in order to explode this idea?

So you were taken away forcibly to Germany. —You were compelled to join a convoy of French deportees, and your body which used to leave home, go to bookshops, art galleries, theaters, cinemas, cafés, which lunched or dined at friends' homes, which went to libraries and museums, which unrestrainedly bought suits that appealed to it, which went to the barber's to have its hair cut in the style it really appreciated and chose a specific shampoo for the style it really appreciated (for liberty implies humor), this body, you say, was dressed in fireman's clothes and put to work on an engine, and this meant good-bye to style and shampooing, to a well ironed suit and a clean shirt every day (I understand you since I wore rough regulation shirts myself for six years; it was madame Régis the superintendent who gave me my first proper one on Dr Ferdière's orders. A city shirt with a collar and a tie since Dr Ferdière didn't want me to be dressed here as an internee).

Instead of a suit and a shirt, you received a bombardment of glowing cinders and spent your days shovelling coal into the belly of a piece of machinery which you would gladly have sent elsewhere to get stuffed.

And the pain of deportation was intensified by the pain of exile.

Exile leads to witchcraft, the foreign psyche casts a spell which catches a man night and day and demands that he sweat out his consciousness in its direction, it is manipulative modelling. —You told me you had not been ill-treated. —But only the rebellious are ill-treated, following the official method and manner, I mean that the

oppressor's secret procedure and underlying intention when he confronts the oppressed dissuade him from *injuring* his body immediately. The victor does not destroy the vanquished, it is not in his interest to get rid of the vanquished but to *penetrate* him with a peculiar poison until the latter's nature resembles his own, and the vanquished is no longer there but only his body without any consciousness except the victor's. Everybody knows that operations of this kind occur but one is not aware that they are wilful and concerted and performed, I mean *lived* by a number of individuals whose unique function it is to think about interesting individualities and to do every thing possible in order to infect them with the virus of deportation, internment, imprisonment and bondage and also with the virus of *nationality*.

Hitler practiced this operation on a large scale. —In fact he himself was not called Hitler, because Hitler isn't a name which in Yugoslav, in Moldo-Wallach, in Czech can be put on the plane of hip-hip hurrah, hallelujah, hosanna, de profundis, but a word, a sort of exclamation which can be put on that plane when the surname isn't put there.

I've forgotten his surname but I met him in Berlin in 1932 in a café, a hollow imitation of the Dôme at Montparnasse called the Romanisches café. —The Gypsies' Cafe. —For the so-called Hitler pretended to be a so-called bohemian.

I was playing in an unimportant film called *Coup de feu à l'aube*; the previous year I had played in a film I remember much more favorably called *l'Opéra de quat-sous*; on that occasion I was visited by a policeman who frightened me but then proved friendly and told me to spit on hitlerism. But the genuine Hitler of the Romanisches café told me on the contrary that he intended to impose Hit-lerism, as if it were hip-hip hurrahism, and he also cited the way one had once tried to create Eurasia (Europe-Asia). The whole caboodle! I told him he was nuts to have ideas like that. Besides I knew perfectly well that he was a so-called initiate, that is to say a spell-casting megalomaniac,

one of the most accomplished specimens of one of the cliques that claim to lead the nations not by acts but solely by ideas, I mean virtually magnetic movements of ideation, I mean psychic waves, etc. An awful fight ensued during which the so-called Hitler had the police summoned in order to have me arrested. And in fact they came but they sided with me against this repugnant Moldo-Wallach who subsequently ruled Germany under the presupposed name of Hitler. —For that Hitler, the Hitler of history, was really a Moldo-Wallach, that is to say the descendant of a race of ancient hanged men known for their mysterious machinations with the breath of the ancient dead. Hitler is dead but his race has not ceased being destructive and it still sees him and calls for him everywhere. You know the legend of the mandragora, that sort of breath seed which is said to grow at the foot of gallows, under hanged men's corpses, and to come from their ejaculations of sperm at the final moment of strangulation. Hitler claimed in secret that he came from it. —For the Moldo-Wallachs of Berlin had premeditated not only your deportation, Mr. Pierre Bousquet, but many others. —And they still haven't stopped premeditating, though they have returned to Moldo-Wallachian. —For the whole world has suffered from hitlerism except the genuine Hitlerians who did not declare themselves conquered, but using one conjuring trick or another succeeded in escaping from Germany and returned to their country.

Through their machinations and conjuring tricks a more serious deportation awaits us all, something like an indefinable part of ourselves toward an unknown destination, while as for us, we shall no longer be there, and hitlerism will have replaced and converted Europe and Asia into a sort of Eurasia. It is a myth but there are many others. For we are surrounded by Myths which want to use us for their accouchements, what is to be done?

Build a stage in order to make these pitiless myths dance on the boards, and change them into real beings before imposing them on everybody through the seminal mandragora of the semence of ideas.

With kind regards.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

P.S. To dance is to suffer a myth, to replace it therefore by reality.

Notes

Most of the following Notes are selected from and based on the *Notes* at the end of *Lettres écritures de Rodez 1945-1946*, Volume XI of the *Oeuvres Complètes* of Antonin Artaud, Gallimard 1947. My own few contributions are limited to comments on the translation. Translating the letters, I occasionally incorporated information from the exegeses in the *Notes*, but details of this kind are not indicated below. Instead, I have concentrated on points of general interest and on important biographical material.

Title page: The letter from Arthur Adamov to Antonin Artaud, dated 21 March 1945, is reproduced in full on page 300 of Volume XI by the compiler of the *Notes*. For more on this subject see the note below on the letter to Picasso.

To Jean Dequeker: Jean Dequeker had recently joined the Free French Forces and was at Toulouse waiting to be posted. Previously, in March 1945, he had been appointed as a doctor to the psychiatric hospital at Rodez. Antonin Artaud enjoyed a much more amicable relationship with him than he did with Dr. Ferdière or Dr. Latrémolière. On his return (26 May 1946) to Paris, Artaud continued to write regularly to Jean Dequeker, and, on 31 January 1947, invited him to Paris: "Come to Paris, I'll pay the fare." Jean Dequeker and his wife helped considerably to make Artaud's last year at Rodez more tolerable.

To Jean Paulhan, 9 September 1945: The *Tarakhyan* is an invented title. In *Appendice 1* of *Héliogabale*, however, Artaud refers to a certain Tarak'hyan in his comments on a passage in *De l'état social de l'homme* by Fabre d'Olivet; but he makes a mistake here in the person's name, which is actually Tarak'ya in the book by d'Olivet.

To Pablo Picasso: On 26 February 1946, Marthe Robert and Arthur Adamov had gone to Rodez in order to visit Antonin Artaud and to ask Dr. Ferdière about the conditions for his release. Before they left, Antonin Artaud entrusted Arthur Adamov with a letter for Picasso. We know this through a letter by Arthur Adamov,

dated 21 March 1946 (sic): he informs Antonin Artaud of the steps he has taken with a view to obtaining paintings and manuscripts which could be sold at auction in order to raise the sum required for his release: ". . . We are going to arrange an auction so that you will be able to live in peace for a while: we already have paintings—or promises—from Braque, Chagall, Gioacometti, Balthus, Gruber, Brauner, Tal Coat, Picabia, etc. Éluard, Gide, Paulhan, Barrault, etc. will provide manuscripts. Picasso is not in Paris, but he will certainly give a painting. I've given the letter you wrote to him to Eluard who will forward it." Picasso never received the letter however.

Our text is probably a first draft for this letter, or at least for the part of this letter which was inspired by a painting by Picasso, in all likelihood *La femme qui pleure* (The woman who weeps), a reproduction of which had appeared in the review *l'Heure nouvelle* (No. 1, 1945) as an inset plate placed just after the extracts of *Notes* and of letters by Antonin Artaud, published under the title *Fragments*.

l'Heure nouvelle (The new hour) was founded by Arthur Adamov, who told Antonin Artaud, in a letter dated 21 March 1945 (sic) (an extract of which is the epigram to this translation), that he has "chosen this idiotic title in order to put in exergue the phrase of Rimbaud which sums up my thought: *'oui, l'heure nouvelle est au moins très sévère'* (yes, the new hour is at least very severe)." The review would aim as "a single point, the central summit of the interior of everything. We shall challenge everything at every moment."

To Pierre Bousquet: Pierre Bousquet, who was a friend of Jean Dequeker, had attempted more than once to use his important connections in order to overcome the difficulties regarding Artaud's release which had arisen with the local administration.

In the film *l'Opéra de quat'sous*, directed by G.W. Pabst, based on the work by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, and, anteriorly, on that of John Gay, Antonin Artaud played an apprentice beggar. —N.G.

Antonin Artaud

Letter to Peter Watson

Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman, Bernard Bador and David Maclagan

Paris, July 27th, 1946

Dear Sir,

I entered into literature by writing books in order to say that I was unable to write anything, my thought when I had something to say or to write was what denied me most. I never had any ideas and two very short books, 70 pages each, revolve about this profound, inveterate, endemic absence of any idea. They are l'Ombilic des Limbes and le Pèse-Nerfs.

At the time they seemed to me full of cracks, of faults, of platitudes, and as if stuffed with spontaneous abortions, of renunciations and all sorts of abdications, always traveling along the side of anything essential or big that I wanted to say and which I said that I never would say. —But after 20 years' lapse they appear to me staggering, successful not in respect to me but in respect to the inexpressible. Thus it is that works age in the bottle and that while all of them *lie* as far as the writer is concerned, in themselves they constitute a bizarre truth which life, if it were authentic itself, should never have accepted. —An inexpressible expressed through works which are nothing but a present shambles, and which have value only through the posthumous distance of a spirit dead with time and stalemated in the present, will you tell me what it is?

Since then I have written several other works: l'Art et la Mort,

Héliogabale, le Théâtre et son Double, Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras, Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre, Lettres de Rodez.

In each one I have been pursued by this sinister harlequinade of a well with stories of texts superimposed one on top of another and which appear only on one level, like the grid of a secret checkerwork, in which yes and no, black and white, truth and falsehood although contradictory in themselves have dissolved into one man's style, that of this poor Mr. Antonin Artaud.

I do not remember being born in Marseilles on the night between the 3rd and the 4th of September 1896, as my civil status states, but I do remember having argued there with a serious question, in a place which was not one, situated between space and a sinister world, fortuitous, unliveable, grotesque, dreadfully nonexistent.

Space led onto a ladder of lives where I saw no interruption to my being,

the sinister, dreadful, grotesque world was that of this very life.

The question with which I was arguing was to know if I will go to a white mass grave, if, always tired of existing, I will turn myself over to that white center which . . . .

or if I will remain faithful to that dark water, to that acqueous lid of a crate of dark water, which was holding me obstinately back. —That smelled of shit on my heart, this crate with my torso inside, but it was my ego, the excrement.

In short the crate was a bloody torso, but the torso of a man, while the white hole that offered me its soul, a woman, was but nothingness to me.

Will I turn to the mother or will I stay father, the—in short—eternal father that I was?

It must be believed that I must have chosen to be father for eternity, for I've been a man for 50 years now and I don't see that this could change.

For if before this life I have had others I do not believe that there are others afterwards.

Death is not just a state of passage. It is a state that never has existed, for if it is difficult to live it is getting more and more impossible and ineffective to die, —looking carefully at this life I remember being dead in it really and corporeally at least 3 times, once at Marseilles, once at Lyons, once in Mexico and once at the Rodez asylum in the trances of electro-shock. Each time I was aware of having left my body and having traveled through spaces, but not very far from my own body, for one is never very well detached. And in reality one never leaves one's body. The body is a trunk of which one is only a leaf when one realizes that one is dead, and that one is not outside but inside.

For the deadman has only one idea it is to return to his corpse, to take it back again in order to go forward.

But it is always he who takes *you* back,

and one obeys because one is inside.

So then the deadman is a being who lies, one must suffer still, now is not the moment, says the voice of consciousness that dreams, and those who speak are they deadmen or living-men? —One can no longer tell. —Dead, I have been seized by the tornado of beings all chafed from hate, and unhinged. —This hate gave me an idea, which I felt going around in my absent ears, and which brought my hand back to my side. This idea was that each being had made me lose an event, and that death was merely a story that I should have lived living.

Dead, one dies on the wrong side, it is not the path that one should take.

Only, as long as I am alive, I don't believe in the path, and I do not believe that the dead believe in it or have to argue about it. One is not dead really dead when one adds up this or that.

And does it interest you, dear Mr. Peter Watson, to know how one is when one does not, really does not, add things up. —And what happens otherwise than there, and whether one is or whether one is not there.

Well, I don't think that does interest you and as far as I am con-

cerned, for a long, a very long, a very long time it has ceased to be of interest to me!

Enough, enough and enough of questions and problems, of problems and questions, of life and thought, of death and separated souls (and this rhymes, can't you see that it rhymes? Oh this life that never wants to leave us alone). But then wait before thinking until you have at least something to say, Mr. Artaud.

No, I, Antonin Artaud, well then no, well then precisely no, I, Antonin Artaud, I want only to write when I have nothing more to think. —Like someone eating at his stomach, at the winds of his stomach from inside.

You say that the English public doesn't know me. And where indeed could they have picked up "la Correspondence avec Jacques Rivière," "l'Ombilic des Limbes," "le Pèse-Nerfs," "l'Art et la Mort," "le Moine" de Lewis, "Héliogabale ou l'Anarchiste couronné," "les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre," "le Théâtre et son Double," "le Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras," "les Lettres de Rodez," and last and especially "*Letura d'Eprahi*," written in 1935, into which I put the best of myself, and which has been lost and which I have never recovered although it was printed so magnificently in characters taken out of ancient incunabulum,

no,

in characters of which the most ancient incunabulum were only an imitation,

a duplicate tracing,

a castrated transposition of its own head,

and, excuse me for using bizarre, and somewhat pedantic words, but I will give you a transposition

voctrovi

cano dirima

cratirima

enectimi

vonimi
cano victrima
calitrima
endo pitri

calipi
ke loc tispera
kalispera
enoctimi

vanazim
enamzimi

all stupid incantations in a false lingua franca, fit to summon sham deadmen

to say that after the printing of this book the world buggered off, and that before the first incunabulum the world also had buggered off. For from time to time, dear Mr. Peter Watson, life makes a leap, but that is never written in history and I have never written except to fix and perpetuate the memory of these cuts, these scissions, these ruptures, these brusque and bottomless falls

which

. . . .

but imagine, dear Mr. Peter Watson, that I have never been more than a sick man and I shall not go on about it to you.

I repeat to you, I have never been able to live, to think, to sleep, to talk, to eat, to write

and I have never written except to say that I have never done anything, could never do anything, and that in doing something in reality I was doing nothing. My whole work has only been and could

only be built on this nothingness,

on this carnage, this scrimmage of extinguished fires, of dried up cries and slaughter,

one does nothing, one says nothing, but one suffers, one despairs and one fights, yes, I believe that one really does fight. —Will the struggle be evaluated, will it be judged, will it be justified?

No.

Will it be specified?

No again,

naming the struggle is to kill nothingness, perhaps.

But above all to stop life . . .

One will never stop life.

But will one come out onto the plain at least, I mean onto the terreplein of after the battle. To sniff the memories of the struggle?

Never.

The struggle has started up again further below, so what? An escharrasage for perpetuity? An indefinite scraping at the wound. The infinite ploughing of the fissure from where the wound emerged?

Perhaps!

But you're mad?

Indeed not; and it is you who are only an imbecile,

I, Antonin Artaud, I am boiling, I am boiling, you, critic, you graze my cock outside.

And that is all that characterises you, that stops you, and that makes you.

There where I am nothing has any more meaning and life is not, it is not at your lubricious water level, you who like only what can be appreciated.

You don't have to have a tongue for eating or for speaking but for jousting, for planting the tip of your brain in the unctuous silt of the throe, and for stirring it, for making it stir like a mayonaise or an aioli, you have not made the throe which makes you exist, oh

cowards, for you emerged from its pain, like fugitives, and it is on the cream of your flight that you have based your life. —*To gauge* evil is this lubricious state with which you have made your metric nipple stall, your kind of calculated argot!

arganufta
daponsida
parganuft

ebanufte
parganupt
ebanupte
pelozipter

palon
petonme
onme
niza

All your great books from the Vedas to the Gospels by the way of the Upanishads, the Brahma Putras and the imitation of Jesus Christ consist only of this search for a happiness and a beatitude whose basis is an erotic,

not a love but an erotic,

the search for a *deficiency* state as a low water mark of the infinite.

He who lives takes no rest and does not know if he belongs to happiness or to the Miserere,

to hell or to paradise.

He lives and that's all.

Music doesn't stir his flesh.

(and the aioli contemplates you, spirit, and you contemplate your

aioli. At last shit to the infinite!)

Contemplative states are the states of lubricious buzzards, of re-routers of grounded energy, of those with their *anomaly* circumcised.

The anomaly being the evidence.

The male is built on the strong anus, the anus is not a hole but the penis.

The anus being the sphincter, a suffocation which always takes a being who wants to live, and judges him, what? Yes, judges him according to his intrinsic capacity for suffocating this suffocation. For being before the tightening of the penis, the male of the most intense tightening.

But then that is bad verbal sophistry, all of it. —The Jew in reality is he who from life and from being wanted to extirpate suffering as *the omagy* of existence. I say the-omagy. —What does that mean?

It means liege man, and liege om.

Breath the omagy of death. The terrible misdemeanor of entering into being, without pain, so that death is no longer in om.

But that one should live happily off the dead, happily off the camphor and powder of the valorous corpses of the dead.

I am that deadman whose powder is eaten: thyroidal or ovarian extract of caput, of the end of when it's finished and I know it.

Awful petits-bourgeois initiated into puckering their mouths in a kiss shape to suck in the departed soul, they eat my departed soul powder in this fashion night and day,

which is why I am sick each time I wake up, and I am sick all day long.

For there would be no sickness without vampires, spellbinders and initiates.

How well I know it.

I know from which abject centers these maneuvers go forth over all the earth, and who those millions of living are who to live have thus chosen to bask in the dust,

the dust of survivor selves,
the dust of myself, surviving.

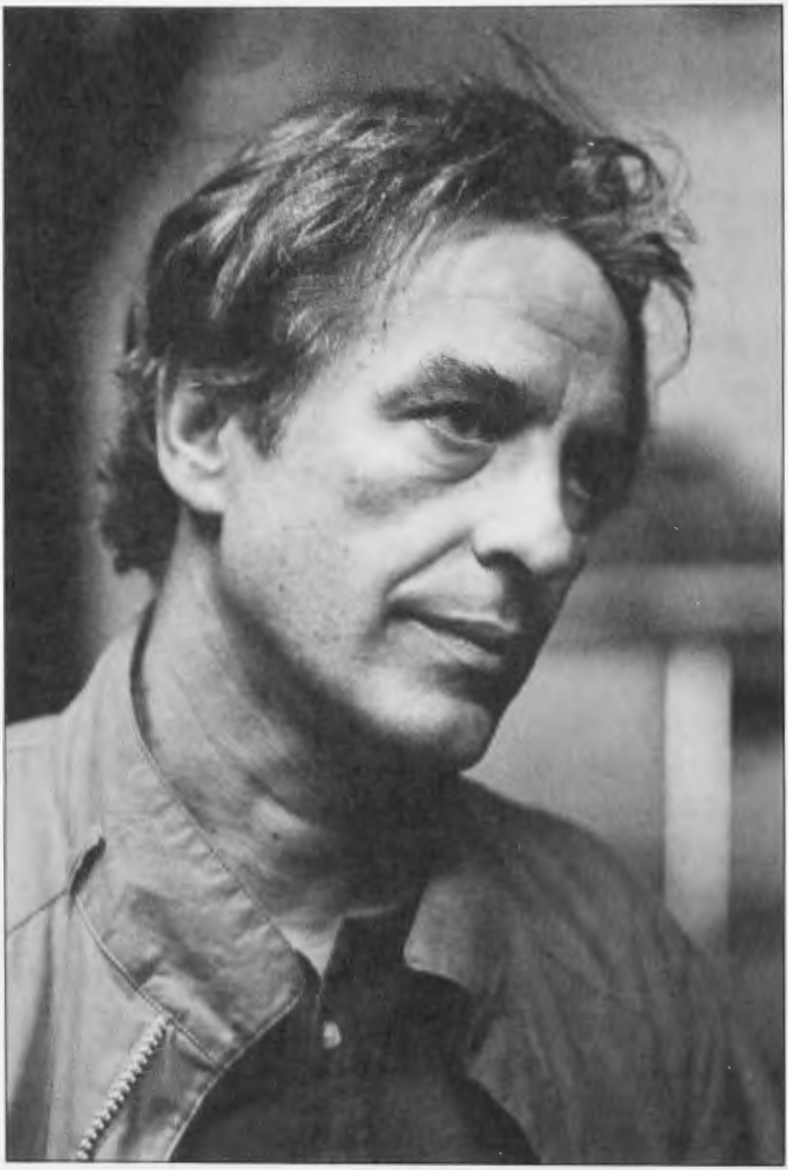
And it was to shut my mouth that in 1937 in Ireland I was thrown into prison, then locked up and confined in France for 9 years in a lunatic asylum.

My work says much less than my life about all this, but it says it.

Very amicably yours.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

September 13, 1946.



Cassavetes watching a dress rehearsal

Photographs by Steve Reisch. Photos printed by Isgo Lepijian.

A Note on "Three Plays of Love and Hate"

Go through your mind what the attitude
would be if there were no lines.
—JOHN CASSAVETES

During the first six months of 1981, a momentous occurrence and milestone for experimental and equity waiver theater (99 seats, no payment to the artists) took place in Los Angeles. The event was orchestrated, and made possible by the artistic leadership and financial endowment of John Cassavetes, the world-renowned actor-director-writer.

Cassavetes and Ted Allan (author of *Lies My Father Told Me*) had long desired to create a theater event, involving three full length plays, focusing on the passions within the family, and the attraction/polarity within intimate relationships.

Three Plays of Love and Hate were conceived independently. "The Third Day Comes" was written in 1980 by Ted Allan. "Love Streams" was evolved from a two-character play, "I've Seen You Cut Lemons," by Allan, and was produced in London in 1970, directed by Sean Connery. The play was radically altered and expanded with the intention of creating a film (which will soon be under production). Cassavetes wrote "Knives" in 1979.

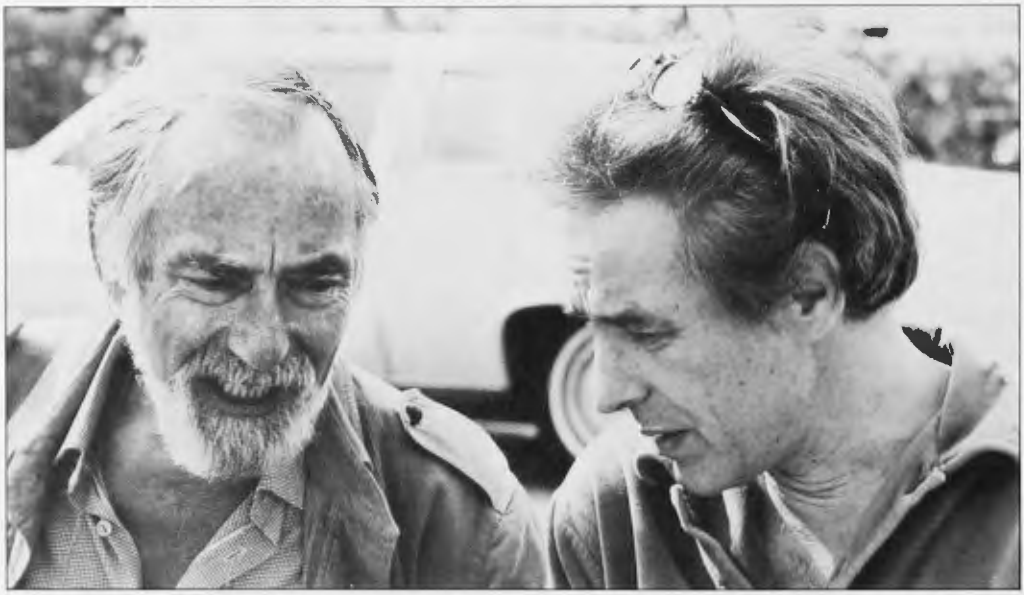
Volunteering for roles in this nonprofit production were Jon Voight, Gena Rowlands; Peter Falk and Michael McGuire. This core of well-known actors acted as a magnet in attracting literally hundreds of artists and craftsmen to the project, 300 of whom appeared in the actual productions.

A theater was located that was struggling to stay on its feet. A deal

was made with the California Center for Performing Arts to allow the Center's production of "Look Homeward, Angel" to continue while the Cassavetes group leased the theater and initiated the extensive physical alterations necessary to provide the space envisioned for *Three Plays*. Not only did the Cassavetes group completely renovate the theater, stage, and lobby (including painting the building's exterior), but virtually every other aspect of the building changed also.

During the rehearsal process, and the construction of stage and sets designed by James Eric, as well as during the production of the plays, Steven Reisch took over 3000 candid photos.

Since video and TV coverage of the event was not allowed, there has been, to date, no documentation (other than newspaper reviews). Sooner or later, the event should be elaborated in book form, making use of the interviews either already recorded, or offered, by Allan, Voight, Rowlands, Falk, McGuire, and Cassavetes himself. We hope that such an elaboration may be stimulated by our brief presentation in *Sulfur*. —C.E., *March, 1983.*



Ted Allan and Cassavetes discussing a scene from Love Streams

James Eric

Working With Cassavetes

Working with John is like working with a magician with one foot in black magic and one in white. He takes devotees in his arms like a conjurer, then drops them in a playground of chaos.

He has no answers; only more questions. Yet he has the answer for himself: "Let's play, let's have fun and we'll find something." It won't be the answer and it most certainly won't have anything to do with the question.

The movie industry is frightened of him, but then the industry is frightened of all artists who demand their freedom. The industry must have slaves. Time is money. John is slave to no one.

He is the hero of the struggling actor-film maker. A hero of those who thumb through their stack of unproduced screenplays daily and know that if they hold out a little longer, one day the right contact will be made and they too will do something with integrity.

The title, "Three Plays of Love and Hate," not only describes the character of the plays but the relationship all 200 of us had with John. Sometimes these emotions shifted to the beat of one's heart. Sometimes love would last a week. One thing was sure: the lovely divine drunken companionship you felt tonight would turn into a hateful hangover tomorrow.

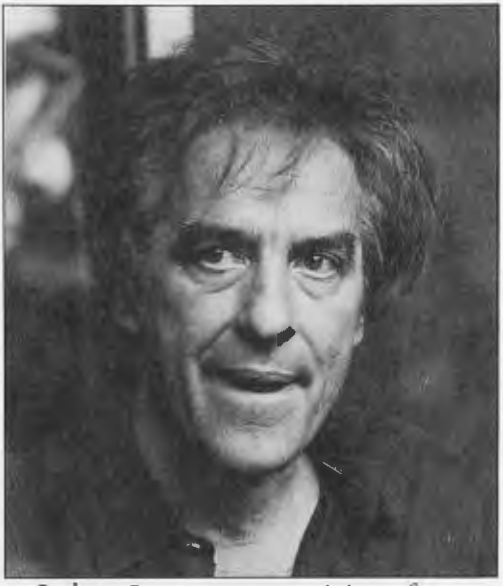
He set a supreme example for the Hollywood Community of Stars. He chose an impossible task: to direct three new plays at once. He put up his own money and we converted a warehouse into a beautiful theater. He encouraged other "name" artists to give of their time and together they renewed the lives of all who took part by giving of themselves. The prerequisite to enter? Give me your life for

six months. This was never spoken, but one knew it after the first reading.

John gave the tickets away to all those involved. We played to packed houses for four weeks. He turned down offers to film the plays for TV, saying "It would only confuse things . . . it was *not* our original intention." The reviewers did not understand the event. John mentally lit a match to their effigy. He walked away in a bloodless body and asked for none of the material things that he had given back. A week after we closed the press wrote a glowing resurrection.

Rehearsal scene from Knives

Gena Rowlands waiting to rehearse



John Cassavetes waiting for a response from Peter Falk

Cassavetes explaining an approach to a character to Jon Voight

Rowlands and her daughter Zoe Cassavetes during a reading of Love Streams

Rowlands with dog (played by Neill Bell) in Love Streams

Cassavetes discussing a new idea for The Third Day Comes *with Michael McGuire*

Photo by Hank Fieger

Rowlands and McGuire in a scene from The Third Day Comes

Peter Falk and judge (John Hawker) in Knives

A Love Poem

silver
the steps,

railings
and silvered roof's

rim
in the dawn light

piridae cardamine

attached
with
a silken girdle

caught
in the dawn

•

bringer of news, but of little

the earth
parched and of trees

dying

to have watched them

clambering,

winding
strip of wings

dwindling

and laved

in green

shrouds

scatter

•

are you on a soul-ship

pitched

between
threshold
and void

drummed

further

and further

from your orchards'

pale children

•

in the dark
air, stones

shine the attendants

cloud-
sealed agate

malachite

it runs
veined like its sisters

through grass, the

healer,

Althea

•

muted, the
crystals

un-
changing

as if
time

weren't

mountain the hymns

under
ground

of stone

reaching *die Berührung*

the bridge, an

infinite

affirmative

'yes' quiet

transparent châteaux

•

as when, late
in spring

above timber and rock

bristled
with flowers

orchis, the
bee's lip

purple haze over snow

•

but you,

have you not seen

love
change

and light

un-
crested

the red sun

cast
a blood red reflection

shadows of things,
broken, their

unclaimed

mosaics

•

thus turning

and dipping,

the infrangible
you

chrome-
tipped

your banners

the sleeping crystals'

in-
most

oriflamme

•

day
falters

in bells, all
earth's

dancers, the poem

...l'amour
réalisé du désir

while remaining

desire

what

the throated, star-
stepped

terraces sing.

△

Velimir Khlebnikov

Seven Poems and an Essay

Translated from the Russian
by Paul Schmidt

Wind whose
Song, wound
Whose wrong?
Rage of blade to be blood
(I'm dead, I'm dead)
Staining arms in sanguine streams.
I renew, eye
You, know you.
Brave new.

△

Bow! Wow! Bow!
Black bunch
Bow! Wow! Bow!
Running dogs
Bow! Wow! Wow!

The Russian poet Velimir Khlebnikov, Futurist, friend of Mayakovsky and Malevich, contemporary of Pound and Yeats, was one of the great poetic explorers of the twentieth century. These poems are from a translation of his collected writings now in preparation.

Rage in snow
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Outside town
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Rip the dead
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Eat Someone's leg
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Eat someone's arm
Bow! Wow! Wow!
Belly Blood
Snout Snow

△

P pay o P—that what the lip say
Say hey o me—that what the see say
Bo bay o B—eyebrow, what he say
Say say o lay—that what the look say
Chee chee o chay—that what the chain say,
On the canvas of such correspondences
Somewhere beyond all dimensions
A face has a life of its own

△

Crawling crying craven
Stains the twilight sky
Falling where the raven
Turns the why-light of his eye.

△

The law of the see-saw argues
That your shoes will be loose or tight,
That the hours will be day or night,
And the ruler of earth the rhinoceros
Or us.

△

Bakunin Baking In Baku

(excerpt)

A bomb from Bombay
Goes boom in Baku—Bakunin
Brings us back to basics,
Wounding several English ladies
By the Bay of Baku
Who obey
The Bey of Baku

△

LAFFERS LOVE LAFFING
O NEVER LEAVE LAFFING
LAFF-LIVERS LIVE LAFFERS
RELIEVING LAFFS RELIVING LAFFTER
LAFFTER OF LOVERS LIGHT LAFFIRES OF LAFFTER
MAKE LAFFERS OF LUFFERS MAKE LOVERS OF LAFFERS
LET LAVERS WITH LOUFFAHS THROUGH LOUVERS LAFF

LOUD
LET LAFFTER'S LASERS TURN LOSERS TO LOVERS
LOVE LAFFING LAFF WHEN THE LUFFERS AND LEAVERS
HAVE LEFT
KEEP LAFFING RELIVING RELIEVING THROUGH LAFFTER
LAFFERS LOVE LAFFING
O NEVER LEAVE LAFFING

△

People say a poem must be understandable. Like a sign in the street, which carries the clear and simple words "For sale" . . . . But a street sign is not exactly a poem. Though it is understandable. On the other hand, what about spells and incantations, what we call magic words, the sacred language of paganism, words like "shagadam, magadam, vigadam, pitz, patz, patzu"—they are rows of mere syllables which the intellect can make no sense of, and they form a kind of beyondsense language in folk speech. Nevertheless an enormous power over mankind is attributed to these incomprehensible words and magic spells, a direct influence upon the fate of man. They contain powerful magic. They claim the power of controlling good and evil and influencing the hearts of lovers. The prayers of many nations are written in a language incomprehensible to those who pray. Does a Hindu understand the Vedas? Russians do not understand Old Church Slavonic. Neither do Poles and Czechs understand Latin. But a prayer written in Latin works just as powerfully as the sign in the street. In the same way the language of magic spells and incantations rejects judgments made by everyday common sense.

This fragment of an essay was found among Khlebnikov's papers, and was most probably written in 1919-1920. Gastev and Alexandrovsky were two of the earliest and best known of the "proletarian poets" whose work was published immediately after the revolution.

Its strange wisdom is composed of the truths contained in separate sounds: sh, m, v, etc. We do not yet understand these sounds. We confess that honestly. But there is no doubt that these sound repetitions constitute a series of universal truths spoken before the twilight of our soul. If we think of the soul as split between the government of reason and a stormy population of feelings, then incantations and beyondsense language are appeals over the head of the government to the population of feelings, a direct cry to the twilight of the soul or a supreme example of democracy in the life of language and reason, a lawful device reserved for rare occasions. Another example: Sophia Kovalevskaya owes her talent for mathematics, as she herself makes clear in her memoirs, to the fact that the walls of her nursery were covered with unusual wallpaper—pages of her uncle's book on higher algebra. We must acknowledge that the world of mathematics is a stringently prohibited area as far as the feminine half of humanity is concerned. Kovalevskaya is one of the few mortals who has attained that world. Could a child of seven really have understood those symbols—equal signs, degrees, brackets—all the magic marks of sums and deductions? Of course not; nevertheless they exercised a decisive influence on her life, and it was under the influence of her childhood impressions of this mysterious wallpaper that she became a famous mathematician.

Similarly the magic in a word remains magic even if it is not understood, and loses none of its power. Poems may be understandable or they may not, but they must be good, they must be truthful.

From the examples of the algebraic signs on the walls of Kovalevskaya's nursery that had such a decisive influence on the child's fate, and from the example of spells, it is clear that we cannot demand of all language: "be easy to understand, like the sign in the street." The speech of higher intelligence, even when it is not understandable, falls like seed into the fertile soil of the soul and only much later, in mysterious ways, does it bring forth its shoots. Does the earth

understand the writing of the seeds a farmer scatters on its surface? No. But the corn still grows in autumn, in response to those seeds. In any case, I certainly do not maintain that every incomprehensible piece of writing is beautiful. I mean only that we must not reject a piece of writing simply because it is incomprehensible to a particular stratum of readers. The claim has been made that poems about labor can be created only by people who work in factories. Is this true? Isn't the nature of a poem to be found in its withdrawal from itself, from its point of contact with everyday reality? Is a poem not a flight from the I? A poem is related to escape, in the shortest time possible its language must cover the greatest distance in images and thoughts.

. . . that there is no place to escape from the self. Inspiration always betrays the poet's background. Medieval knights wrote about poor shepherds, Lord Byron about pirates, Buddha was a king's son who wrote in praise of poverty. Or the other way around: Shakespeare was convicted of theft but wrote in the language of kings, as did Goethe, the son of a modest burgher, and their writing is devoted to portrayals of court life. The tundras of the Pechersky region have never known warfare, yet there they preserve epic songs about Vladimir and his hero knights that have long since been forgotten in the Dnepr. If we consider artistic creativity as the greatest possible deviation of the string of thought from its point of contact in the creator's life, as a flight from the self, then we have good reason for believing that even poems about an assembly line will be written not by someone who works on an assembly line, but by someone from beyond the factory walls. It's always the other way around: once he withdraws from the assembly line, stretching the string of his soul to the fullest length, the assembly-line poet will pass into the world of scientific imagery, of strange scientific visions, into the future of Planet Earth—like Gastev—or into the world of basic human values, like Alexandrovsky, into the subtle life of the heart.

△

Bill Wilson

Kokoschka's Water

sexual terror of the clown,
the heavy dick of a horse
hanging down
smeared with red color,

this is the face you saw in the sound
you heard in the red stair
at the bottom of the dark,
the CLANK! clang

step of the lost
robot-being that Oskar
had lost in the forest,
now having found its way from the forest's edge
walking over what will be your grave
toward the dawn it can't see
seedlings
sprouting in its footprints

Tomato Soup

"Splish, splash, I was taking a bath," sang Bobby Darin
who was born in a cardboard box in the Bronx.
It was a box that tomato soup had come in,
his forlorn bassinet of actuality.
For the rest of his life,
which was the whole of his life,
Bobby Darin couldn't stomach tomato soup.
Yet even though a sickly child, at last he became
  a great success
with lots of girls and women and money
in a black sharkskin suit on a revolving stage in L.A.
He pulled hard on his cigarettes
and washed his throat with bourbon in the manner of the
  café singers of his day.
He kept late hours, you had to
in that world of nightclubs and warehouse districts.
He didn't have a strong constitution to begin with
and all of this wore him down.
Sure, he was headed for an early finish.
But when he would sing Bert Brecht's "Mac the Knife"
through an average radio in a three-bedroom home
you could hear the snuffed fetus still trying to kick
its way through to what would have been the next America
  socialist unblinded democratic advancing
kick and then fall silent beneath the dazzling formica countertop
as the golf cart sailed mildly through the beams of the carport
and the tomato soup sat burning on the range.

The Green Room

Amid the fake silence of two-pound rhinestones
the cherry-pink and apple-blossom-white aardvark
nuzzles the muskrats
                who are my relatives.
Once again some Indians are hacked up in Guatemala
and the United Fruit Company stands there smirking,
                holding the smoking banana.
I'm in here doing the dishes and listening to a needle
                siphon the song from a record,
                the meaning from the words,
                the blood from an arm. Why
does the arm fail to go around someone?
The song hangs around in the air awhile
like the smell of a meal after the dishes are put away.
The meaning enters the blood, the green room.
Thus
after 30,000 years
the light from a certain star finally reaches earth
and slurp, the parking lot sucks it up.
(Parking lot = a kind of absence I live.)
I stand in my kitchen
dreaming of a head-shaped cloud that won't move off my head,
                or a ring
some cheerleader in Kansas gave back
in 1948. What are white noise,
                daylight and endlessness?

Lives and particles? Phone calls? Lozenges?
Why
don't I have control why
aren't I driving?
If
I had more time I might
sort some of this out but
I don't
so tonight I'll just go around
choked venal confused sort of broken-hearted.
Ready to fight.

Angelyn Spignesi

Daimon Ice Woman w/Bitch

HAD ELLEN WEST BEEN EDUCATED to cultivate an imaginal perspective, go through the underworld terrain which beckoned her, she could have given birth to and become nurse of Sea-King, God-Father, Glorious Woman, and Armed Man too. This process would have entailed Binswanger's assistance in the delineation of these psychic figures, allowing their full texture and voice to unfold, exploring their relation to her, what they sought from her. When they were not

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This chapter will be appearing in the forthcoming book *Starving Women* which will be published by Spring Publications in 1983.

Some notes on items referring to passages in other chapters of the text:

Ellen West was the patient of the existential analyst Ludwig Binswanger. Today modern psychologists recognize Ellen West as an anorexic, she was possessed by images of food and eating compulsions, and eventually committed suicide.

Helen's Red Wall refers to a part of an active imagination of a patient of the author's. The patient, Helen, while experiencing hate and frustration, opened her inner eye to the spontaneous images and saw a wall of red. The psychological work done on Helen's imaginal world was presented in the preceding chapter.

Ice-Woman, Sea-King, Glorious Woman, Armed Man, Red Man, Bossman and Leopard refer to imaginal figures. These are autonomous figures of the psyche which are collective, which cross generations and are not subject to the time/space dimensions of everyday "reality." They refer to daimonic guides, demonic forces, muses and guardians, appearing to poets, and to others who are in various ways "possessed."

distant enough to inspire her through what became her poetry, they overwhelmed her and manifested themselves in her compulsive greed for and inhibition around food.

Ellen knew the figures and voices mainly as evil and demonic spirits; we wonder how they might have served her more as guardian angels, daimones. Had she yielded to the messages of those figures she might have found enough distance from them, have begun to see their various presences in her daily actions. Therapeutically this distance relates to delineation: personifying and eventually engaging in forms of "active imagination." It entails dialoguing with these figures, taking in their vengeances, their solace, hating them, loving them, giving them her desires, dreams, fears, and (mostly) compulsions.

Ellen too quickly moved out of her *longing* (beckoning her to the place of psychic presences) into *hunger* (for literal food). Instead of gobbling or fleeing the sweets the woman must stop; in order to build a temple for daimones she must cut herself from, slice her greed from the external food by sitting down and fully feeling the longing. She must sit within the greed. In the chasm of her own ravenous and bottomless pit, she can begin to see the images pulsating through her ardent desires. She begins to feel and sense, even dance with, the autonomous psychic figures of her desiring heart.

Interpreting, explaining, or observing the imaginal figures is not the way; the figures of soul do not respond to our mental constraints. Observing is not the same as facing, explaining is not the same as dancing. Reductive classification is not the issue; naming is. Demeter names herself as she founds her temple. Letting the figures name themselves is the point at which this woman, so sensitive to the psyche of others, begins a self-naming.

Ellen West never was able to see that the psychic figures *were* her food, metaphorical food, the seed concealed. All her control and desire remained attached to external food and this attachment drained her imaginal fertility. The only way the starving woman can work out

of her compulsive-inhibitive relation to food is through an education on how to work with the imaginal as it presents itself to her through food.

Such therapeutic work absolves the psychic figures from having to become literalized through symptoms or personal relations (with mother, male, or therapist). Specifically, such personifying releases the woman from entanglement with her personal mother, to whom she has had to cling to remember the desires of the archetypal Mother. This psychic engagement gives both starving woman and personal mother a breath of fresh air and allows the distance doctors have been trying to obtain through literal isolation.

Her being driven by and for food everywhere along with driving the body in inexorable degrees, her relying upon endless charts and diets and scales coupled with her infinite gorging and vomiting show that the female too has a "fire," a combustible aspect which the alchemists spoke of as sulfur. Found abundantly in volcanic regions, this substance, also known as brimstone, represents the spirit of fire. The female is living out the underworld flames dramatically and self-destructively in her most familiar room of the house: the kitchen.

At least within this pathology of food, we see the attempt by the woman to struggle with the sulfuric side, the redness of her most passionate nature. In past centuries she has lived it out vicariously through the man's escapades or as deviants crossing over to the male ways of sparking the combustion. This food pathology represents the female struggle with sulfur in a landscape which is our own: our food, body, and reproduction. Raging sulfur possesses the starving woman to the bitter end or until the blossoming of an underworld perspective turns it around.

What is being worked out here is the female's awakening to her own sulfuric potency and the necessity of allowing it the distance to shape and form itself creatively: her sulfur—desires, vitalities, burnings—"the force that through the green fuse drives the flower"—her glare. This is what the Mother asks her to place. We assist this placing

and naming of the sulfuric side by allowing the woman the distance to sit alone and let the redness take shape while feeling its desires, as with Helen's red wall. This pause ceases the dramatic compulsive enactment of the sulfuric aspect in terms of food and body, and we begin to explore the sulfur as image.

To engage the sulfur imaginally means returning to where food is "alive" and potentially poisonous or dangerous. Remember that the invisible animation of food moves her, feeds her, drives her. Food carries the tyrant, the psychic presence which is destructive, death-dealing. The presences appearing within and through food need to be digested, not vomited.

So we allow the food to be alive, to return to the living: matter as animated, food becoming ensouled. We allow the food to glare out its poisonous forces. Who is taking shape? Red man? Leopard? Bossman? Armed man? How does starving woman relate to such figures? It is interesting if not disconcerting to see how often this sulfuric side of power and vitality is represented in male form (even for woman-identified women who have changed their gender allegiance culturally). Since external men have enacted sulfuric aspects for thousands of years—and cultivated this particularly through sports, war, government—it is not surprising that in the reservoirs of our memories sulfur is imaged as male. As we open ourselves to the panorama of the female imagination, we can relate to sulfur in ways compatible to our inherent nature (sulfuric properties once carried by Red Hades move into a female seed within.)

The therapeutic process involves delineation of the fire-figure exacting vengeance through food. We must name it, find out its texture and context. Also we must be aware of the tendency to meddle with human concerns. When Demeter was beginning to engage with what was becoming an immortal fire-spirit, a daimon-of-sulfur, Metanira interfered with dayworld and personal fears.

This interference reminds us how easy it is to identify the awakening fire-aspect as male and live it out too personally and subjectively

in emotional terms (serving an actual male tyrant, for example; or, therapeutically, working exclusively on such relationships). Leaving one's ground to know sulfur in its common manifestations is not the way to the potency of our hot inner nature. Instead woman is consumed; there is no body, no hearth to contain and craft the flame. It leads to disembodied ambitions or tyrannical compulsions.

Demeter kept her own ground, insisted on her own grain drink, as she engaged with fire-spirit. As therapists we have to remember that a temple must be built for one who is opening to inner psychic presence and particularly to sulfuric sides. Sulfur is found in the world and in all living things, and it returns itself to the world far too fast, without containment, digestion. It fires up as we attach ourselves to the object of our desire.

Sulfur is beckoning the woman through food and possesses her with her obsessions and compulsions around literal food. Her desires and fires all becomes attached to food (and thereby lost to her). Her incessant desire to *have* the food has been all that lit up the world for her, preventing her from knowing the spark of that which makes the food desirable.

Demeter is in her temple as Hades and Persephone "marry". Persephone digests the red seed giving her rule over the underworld. Swallowing the seed shows that Persephone has her own red sulfur, her hot inner nature. The digestion guarantees against her consumption by "external" fiery tyrannies; it shows she can contain the red and not be possessed by it. She can carry it up and out to Mother's terrain—and return. Female has to "marry" the sulfur by digesting it, containing it within so it circulates interiorly through blood and heart; then she can engage it in and through the world.

Such digestion entails enough distance from and delineation of the red to swallow it. What facilitates this distance and delineation, this containment of red seed, is Sweet Sound and Hate.

Many starving patients are described by the clinicians and physicians as hearing inner voices. Not all are demanding or denigrating:

some are melodic, soothing, exquisite. We imagine that Ellen's Glorious Woman had a sweet, alluring voice. Such sounds carry the woman to soul-companions who can assist her journey through an underworld that need not be Hell.

The sirens with lyre and double flute were companions and servants of the Goddess of the Underworld. They would seduce travellers to Persephone by "the sweet tones of their music and song." Such sounds are not sweet in the sense of being innocent; they do not defend against underworld realities. They are enticing ways to be beckoned to an underworld perspective; if the woman opens herself to the "sounds of her inner ear" (Helen's harpsichord), perhaps there will be melodic incantations she can follow.

Sweet tones of psyche can carry her messages, which, when personified, become the guardian angels of soul. The guidance of such figures will give her company in the unfolding of an imaginal perspective. Lyre and flute were the favorite instruments of Sappho. Through her mixolydian mode she would invite women to unfold their shimmering Aphroditic beauty. Woman has an alluring anima also, dear companion assisting her in knowing the soul's journey through her most exquisite aesthetic sensibilities.

Perhaps also the sweet tones resonate with the inner pulse, and she can dance. She will move and bend and yield to the soul-companions, find the mistresses of soul in her body's motions. Their loving messages of how soul animates all worldly things remind us that the "hidden waves" lying within and beyond each bodily event are also sound waves. They pulsate. Subtle scales of lyre and flute arouse the passions too and truly are prayers to Aphrodite. The sweet sounds of love's seductions carry the starving woman to the bittersweet mysteries underlying dayworld necessities. This fall into love when one is struggling with sulfur ultimately brings forth the redness and fire, carrying her again and again to hate.

On digesting the red seed Persephone, no longer innocent maiden, becomes Goddess of the Dead, Queen of Destruction. The

river Styx (associated with the Greek verb meaning "to hate") nine times circles her underworld. The Goddess Styx became the offspring of Zeus and Persephone. The spirits of revenge, the Erinyes, "Three hellish Furies, boltered all with blood; / Their form and bearing were made woman-wise; / Vivid green hydras girt them, and a brood / Of asps and adders, each a living tress, / Writhed round the brows of that fell sisterhood," were in the Orphic tales offspring of Hades and Persephone. Persephone sends the petrifying head of Medusa to the gates of the underworld, turning invaders to stone: "this head is, in a sort, the other aspect of the beautiful Persephone."

Hate has run through the entire mytheme. Gaia's hate and revenge created the crescent sickle which broke the gods out of their material entrapment. Demeter's fury cooled into "icefall isolation" and temple longing, rage becoming hate. At first her rage was too personal, red sulfur raging through the blackened bitternesses; but then the loosening and moistening with humor and barley drink, a cooling, silver pause. She then had the coolness to let go of child as personal, becoming impersonal mother of flame-spirit, and the rage cooled to a hate of the temple, a purer, more sacred form of hate with an effect even over Almighty Zeus.

Hate is often where we see poignantly and clearly with an inner eye, have insight which penetrates to the Gods in all worldly things. Hate's glare cuts through to rockbottom foundations. We see those we hate often in sharper focus than the loved ones. The hated one stalks us everywhere. For it is the one we hate the most who bears messages to us about sides of the psyche most denied, neglected. The hated one carries our most terrible lack.

To melt the brittle starving woman, go to hate. She has been hardened beyond the joys of puppy love; her way, even in what she knows as love, is hate. Hate is a whiter form of the redness of wrath and fury; it is cooler. Ice Woman with red seed pulsing through the body: the redness is there, stirring the entire being, yet not lashed out, kept in an ice shield, and as it circulates it cools to hate. She faces

the sulfur, the fat of her aching desire, does not act it out, knows it also within as it permeates every living thing. Sulfur charges her body; her skin stands on edge, prickles with the cold of a hate which keeps off touch while the redness in its circulation images itself to her, a type of dance.

If well worked, hate is a way to move like Persephone to and from the black rigidities and fixities (I can't move, I'm trapped, I feel lost, life is empty) to the red fires (I can't control the eating, I can't stop vomiting, I have to work harder, I can't get food or that bastard off my mind), staying psychologically cool yet mobile.

The psychological hate of Persephone is not directed out or in. It is not the ferocious form of redhot fury which vents itself in destruction, nor is it the black sulkiness of passive withdrawals. To swallow and digest the red seed entails facing that ninth circle of hell with the ice woman whose eyes petrify. When the focus is removed from food or literal male tyrants with whom the starving woman is in emotional relation she has to face her ice woman, daimon of soul.

Sitting in one's own psychic cold stare is much more difficult than being or acting out of that coldness, or starving to warm up a tyrannical lover, or being driven compulsively to avoid it. Up to now while possessed by red tyrant's compulsions, projecting her coldness, the starving woman has blindly and rather indiscriminately vented her antagonisms and sharp bite. Now perhaps she can come face to face with the red demons accompanying the cold, begin to discriminate them, which is to know herself.

This process entails looking at the food she most desires and allowing that desire to shape itself even when it emerges as the figure (tyrant of fat) she most hates. Sitting within the desire leads us to the one most hated who asks for our engagement. Biting into the food now involves facing the red-eyed figure. She faces it, lets go, and imagistically engages with it. Invader gets turned to stone, mother-killers are swallowed, fat man is encircled: each move gives her more substance carrying her down to the river's last circle, a descent which is

a sort of submission occurring when dark mother loosens to her own frailty and humor, allowing the emergence of piercing silver-blue eyes and sharp tongue, the beauty that fixates as it transforms, the Queen of Destruction herself. She is the one who sees the red as sensuous independent body, faces it as mate, also nurses it. Demeter's final lowering occurred when she knew the red-spirit through nursing it, holding it in the fire as nurse. Sometimes the raging redness just asks to be impersonally handled by a nurse.

Now there is less need to adhere to the world's potencies and be tyrannized naively and blindly by them. Ice Woman has throbbing purple-red, bittersweet seed within, shining surface containing the crimson juice of paradox and mystery, now materialized and digested, serving as protective measure against the red villains and their possessive forms of consumption. If she cannot keep digesting the vital heat of red (imaging it through her worldly desires) and embodying it (creatively letting those images form themselves) it will be split off from her and literalized again in rampant desires and compulsions.

Since the ice is slippery she no longer sticks to others' effusive emotions; the oily base of their desirous longings do not keep ground with her, and no longer consume. Instead they slip off. She can attach and glide in the world with vitality, without losing herself in those attachments. Ice Woman helps starving woman let go of food's sticky pull on her. She does not give up food, but digests the red carried in the food which depotentiates the tyranny of the food itself while charging her interior circulation and blood-pulse.

Ice Woman keeps the starving woman strong yet resilient and this prevents her from so readily melting into the imaginal pool of another, serving as Iris-medium only. Ice Woman has her own dazzling reflections, and the Hecatean barking bitches surrounding her keep off those who would use her as blank screen only. She learns how to snap.

There is a difference between Iris and Hecate as messenger-god-

desses. For a starving woman struggling with sulfur and getting to know the ice Iris is dangerous. Demeter sends Iris back to Zeus; Iris does not belong in this mytheme. Iris would return it all to beginnings: maiden Persephone romping in flowery fields subject to the commands of a Father Zeus. Likewise Iris would have her continue serving the Hades figure as compliant maiden girl, a blatant denial of the inherent relation of the female to the sulfuric red.

Unlike Iris with her rainbows, Hecate is messenger in a bitchy sense: her message bares teeth, is conveyed with a snarl. Hecate allows intercourse with the world's sulfur with a bite which precludes consumption. Hands off, she growls. She understands the connection between Demeter and Persephone: how daughter brings up her mysteries, lives in them, sees them through the world, always containing (digesting) the underworld fires while in the world. She knows this carrying up of the underworld mysteries needs protection: the stickiness of sulfur's attraction asks for continual distancing.

So Hecate is a protective bitch, not a controlling bitch. The latter is only necessary when the woman is split from the underworld, has nothing to stand on, is in void yet wants to remain blind to it, has lost her soul. Yet Hecate places certain steps on the invisible ground below. With intelligent instincts of an undomesticated bitch, she knows her way in the dark, continually sniffing out the terrain as she circles the sulfur queen, keeping her within certain limits.

Slippery-cool Ice Woman accompanied by Bitch Hecate can work off the sulfur of the world. She is no maiden in an ivory tower separated from the world's flame. With hidden red seed and the lyre's sweet sounds she is sensual in her coolness. She is as stubbornly firm as she is stubbornly tender and mobile. The flux of delicate images shimmers off her icy white contour. One senses diamonds in its shine. Always her ice suggests the momentum and force of the ice-waters running deep, rapids connecting her always with the inner rhythm of the world's pulse, the desirous gaping of the world's mouth.

Therefore she does not leave the world, yet enters and is moved by

the colors, tastes, textures and emotional tones all around, and sees them with a distance not of frozenness as much as the coolness of a "critically imagining eye." There is beauty in this distance as she resonates with the beauty of the world. She tenderly can be enticed into the world's pulse, yet at the point of devouring there comes the knife edge of cynical glances, the bitch bark, the slippery ice letting go, releasing by capturing it all as image.

This movement in the world is not in abstraction, but comes with a bitch-animal immediacy keeping everything riding the whitewater rapids. A doctor examining her bends over too closely, a stranger sits on a love seat too near, now she can sense the spark while gazing over the man's shoulder to see the red sulfuric one laughing in the background. Connected to the image through heart and humor, she bites at the doctor-stranger with an artful retort, a snappy one-liner. He takes one step back knowing the joke is not on him alone, has not to leave the room entirely; she has held her ground elegantly and is stirred vitally. She is laughing while dancing and dialoguing with the red one—a form of digestion.

The table offers her cakes, breads, jams, pastries. Her claw goes out, yet now she can see the opening jaws of red bossman riding lion urging her to blind the imaginal eye and consume. She keeps the eye open (Hecate's headband shining), sees him clearly: the jungle, the swish of the lion's tail. She takes one piece of pastry which carries and is surrounded by the green mysteries of that jungle. She watches the lush foliage unfold as she takes one bite. Images fill her also. One pastry is enough. She leaves the table. Each of Hecate's bites has substance, a vital world in itself.

Hecate as the bitch-whore allows this intercourse with the world's sulfur, and for the starving woman this pertains mainly to food. Food is the language of this pathology attempting to reconnect the female with her (lost) underworld components, so of course it cannot be ignored. Imaginal work does not preclude the things of the world. One cannot work with psychic figures to the exclusion of attending to

food, nor can one "make" the woman, with imaginal eye opened, resume a "normal diet." Therapy directed to a Hecatean perspective will help the woman open her eye to soul, seeing the metaphor in all food.

After all, eating in the underworld gave Persephone a way back. Food can germinate an awakening to psychological "death," to an imaginal consciousness. This was the lesson of the Eleusinian initiates who learned to fast and drink potions to prepare for the vision of (in a sense transformation to) Persephone holding the ear of wheat, which allowed them to see the shades of the dead existing in all living things.

Therefore the woman would go to soul, use her imagining eye, through body and food instead of at their expense. Hecate shows her she has been blessed with an underworld understanding of food. She has been graced with an understanding that what looks to the upperworld like garbage is in the underworld a sacrifice to the Gods. She will become aware of the connection of her eating with the autonomous psychic figures, come to see images as independent, sensuous, concrete morsels, and the "sensible nature of the imagination."

For example, the woman would become aware of the precision of her choices, how precise qualities such as texture, sweetness, color, and consistency of food open her to specific psychic presences. She will become aware of her discriminations, that some substances feed certain psychic figures more than others.

Ellen West's "bizarre" diet at one time was several pounds of tomatoes and twenty oranges daily. The woman within an Hecatean perspective attends to such desire, tries to understand it metaphorically and asks, whose fire is she feeding with all that red-orange substance?

This means watching the desire as it appears and seeing with what particular shape it defines itself. No restrictions or prohibitive measures are necessary, just to feel the desire while seeing with the "imagining eye" (Hecate's shining headband) what unfolds—sulfur

no longer only in food as object-of-desire which must be grasped to know, but sulfur shimmering out at us from the world's delight, sensually inviting us to an intercourse with the world. We gape, not grasp. Gaia's desire is in her gaping; Persephone's grasp led to the rapacious descent to underworld. What she had to learn in the journey was Gaia's gaping as ground of it all. Persephone learned to know that the beauty shining forth from the flower was her own (narcissus): no need to grasp it, instead to stand in awe of the world's dazzling animation. Gaping sends us to the underworld sensually. What occurs when we take in the awe and splendor of the world's sulfuric tinge is not an intimacy coming from subjective or personal dependency, but an intimacy more of the sort Sappho knew, having more to do with an intricate and exquisite rapport with the dew dazzling forth from all living things, a resonance with their sensuous nature.

This intimacy entails seeing and sensing within the desire and imaginal intercourse with each morsel: who is this feeding? What figure needs this sort of nourishment? Nurturing mother and sensual mistress are no longer dichotomous. The sensuality is found in the nourishment now. Once the woman knows intimately the imaginal figures, she attends to them, inquiring what *they* wish to be fed that day. If one in particular looms large and demands too much, perhaps she needs to give him/her/it something special to digest.

This returns her to the sacred connection of her food choices, how everything she digests connects her with presences larger than herself. Her sensuous connection with food now lies outside her subjective satiation/satisfaction. In this way, instead of being victim to the imaginal presence of each food morsel, she engages with it as in a dialogue with soul.

So food begins to take on aesthetic sensibilities; the woman is sensitized to an aesthetic perception within eating. Seeing the images in each concrete morsel lets her be more engaged with the food; now she can *taste* it, make finer more exquisite sensual discriminations. Her desire is stimulated and, now danced with, it does not consume her;

she digests.

Different foods sound different to her; sirens call her to the beauty of specific foods. Such an aesthetic perception allows the woman to sense how spices, exotic and rich foods, as well as specific qualities of basic foods, fill her and carry psychic value. This will return her consciously to psychic essence, how such foods echo an exoticism and richness of soul, and food delicacies remind us of the modesty of soul, huge quantities are no longer necessary.

An aesthetic perception of food in terms of its psychic significance lets her take food out of an exclusively personal context; eating food becomes ceremony—Food Aesthetics. She sees that paying attention to how qualities of food stir and feed the beauty of the imagination, alluring her to soul, is more nourishing than consuming quantities of vitamins and proteins.

The starving woman is serving Gaia by working the female out of her upperworld fixities. Gaia needed to break down the female body and its relation to food and fertility to help her find her relation to soul and death, contain the fire and brimstone of her sulfuric potency. Gaia is showing that the female has seed too, can germinate. When the woman is able to digest the red seed she takes back her "drives," her "creativity."

The food pathology of starving woman calls us to psychological transformation, to the presence of the Goddess of Death entering through Hecatean consciousness. We must welcome Dark Mother with her ice, her bark, her temple, encourage one another to participate with her. What are the implications of this consciousness entering our culture? The female would recover the active presence and potency in her knife, her bite, her seed. First, food and cooking take on a new significance, becoming ritual preparations for an entry to psyche. No longer the place of monotonous domestic drudgery, the kitchen becomes a room in the underworld. Not mother as servant but mother as celebrant to the voices and figures of death residing in food, initiating her child to the ceremonial revelry of the underworld,

the festivity of the many psychic members of the family.

. . . . .

We know that Ice Woman's digested seed accompanied the fruition of the field of Rarian, the womb. Every starving woman has potential offspring, a craft, beneath the skeletal surface. Every starving woman contains aesthetic endeavor if she can feel fully the sulfuric edge, digest and dance with it, allowing it to take shape.

Ice Woman with red seed appears when Demeter takes back her Aphroditic qualities. Mothering takes on a new sensuality. No more redhot lusts opposed to the purities of sweet maternity: the red seed cooled, whitened, shoots up the green fuse and makes every endeavor of the female an aesthetic one with its own inherent order—every action and event fused, sparked, sulfur shimmering through it all. And the sulfur chooses the ice and bitch's bark to define and contain itself, with its own borders, requirements, dimensions; within its fortress she finds an inherent fruition.

Sparked by the animation of the world, she can bring the fruition out, whether in child-care, medical work, legal transactions, literature, mechanics—there is nurturing with an intimacy, a craft with a sounding in every event, an angel in each word. She takes in each of her desires, sees each in its contour and graceful line, participates in its crafting, its exquisite revelation, the unfolding of the design of its patterning. With every slice of the knife, instrument's paring, she hears the lyre beckon her always to the Ice Woman of her heart's desire, sulfuric pulse germinating deeply in each of her cool bites.

Aaron Shurin

from Multiple Heart

When the existence repeated in same phrases came apart at the
hinges,
reconstituted in helical bonds that spiral known as the bigger
bang, fresh
discovery each turn
returns axis central
glance off light, the
shining, seen anew each particular
sentience, flavor, ridiculous in extremities, compact in allegiance,
favorite bondage, (the dispelling of logic in favor of magic), old
monstrosities
come apart in the hands to reveal the workings of inner beauty,
stupefying
exactness of the loop-de-loop courting the air . . .

△

I remember the paintings from their places on the wall, voice of a
secretude.
and then the fable about the boy and all his lack of hair, some
idiotic
punchline at the conclusion of a punch. Heavens that heavenate

above,
a comparison between one good thing and another, the trickle
down effect
of a bright eye over high cheekbones—then give me that thing.

△

Whenever that corruption comes to take me in the arms of its
vicissitudes
I roll in my worminess down the hole as the world turns, so
wounds
the slothy membranes, all of a suddenness my corruptions fail me.
Left in the purity
of the loving heart's stupidity: all is good, needy & beauty

△

the exceptional liftoff of a rocket rammed with a personal hand, a little language of sighs. or a fever that starts with an itchy palm leaves off mid-phrase in a decapitation of the text. the best becomes better only with care, implicit in the infolding of tongues, and the one who goes knowingly down to desire is the one who knows better in the end. Then I look at you as your tongue is lolling, as my own tongue sticks to its gum. For every little leaf that inches a bud, formidable in the face of winds, I notch one notch in my tightened waist, say "now I am beautiful" not because you make me, but because I see you so

△

this delectable shortage of terminal junctures, something like a rose of Castile working itself into full bloom. and after the hip, the saving of face in a pressed album all eyes read as a turned table revolving its disc, some eerie melody connoted by an ascending riff. then the borrowed conjunction of a narrative and its moving parts, a skinny fellow all elbows swimming in a salt sea. or a science of phraseology measuring separate parts of the tongue where every descent is a nascent plot, the coming to grips of a fanned lady in a crowd of samurai, or some lonely bugger casting his leaves to the wind. this where we were or are a fine glass for scrying, relating the crossed beams of starry eyes, or a story of eyes crossed, flush with the influx of sentences lacking periods, turning and burning in the swirl of a fire that holiness must seek heaven . . .

△

One step releases the world. The fire of magic in her eyes lit up the external valves. Invisible to all but the naked eye the naked world trembled in its shell, I beheld the Well of Seeing with a steady gaze. And Rebecca that sang on the desert lip, whose luster of voice eased the parched jug, who wet the men and made them squirm, that stood ablaze in the heat yet cooled by the blue in the black of her hair. Became now before us where we assembled a figure of speech to haunt our desolate ears, in which dim lands immaculate violets grow, colonizing that mulch and loam with a swagger loaded into the rifts of purple ore, a purple of such redness as even her lips may envy . . .

△

John Yau

Carp and Goldfish

SOME FISH WE PEEL BACK, leaving only the bones. Others devour us, leaving only the stories. This one begins in a garden in China, where a young prince is sitting alone on a bench beside a turquoise pond. Each time he snaps his fingers and whistles, the golden red sunset of a carp can be seen rising toward the surface. Five fat scavengers rule this manicured kingdom, and each of them has been endowed with the nobility of a name. When the boy leaves the palace at noon and walks across the garden to feed them, the moment is precise and refined as the emblematic flowers stitched across his robe.

On a warm summer afternoon the algae covered pond is green as nights in the Arctic, when embedded arrows of light sparkle in the sky. For a few moments the boy watches the clouds stretch like cats across the glassy surface. Soon it will be his sixth birthday, and another carp will join the kingdom.

The clouds turn into dragons and back again. The moon trembles against the sky, a slivered almond. One day melts into another.

In the pond the carp are still listening, unable to hear their names drift over the kingdom. The prince is sick and they have been forgotten. Patiently, they circle through their palace, looking for the en-

trance to the room where their master lies, his body burning with fever, his face as crimson as an apple, ripe and ready to fall. Above them only the murmur of the wind hurrying through the mulberry branches.

Eventually, the countryside succumbs to disease and terror. Succeeding reigns of tyrants—their names twisting through history like snakes—bury the pond beneath their own interpretation of heaven's grandeur. Meanwhile, the carp burrow into a book by someone whose ability to remember facts circumscribes his desire to tell stories.

• • •

To the young boy standing in front of the large glass tanks, each hypnotic with activity, all the goldfish looked more or less the same. It was only after he stared into one tank for a long time did he see any difference among them. He chose the two smallest, the ones that would have the most trouble surviving were someone to let them go.

When he got home, his father lay on the couch and took a nap. The mother was out visiting a friend. Already the shadows of the narrow street had started filing quietly into the room.

He lay on his stomach on the floor and stared intently at the fish. Back and forth they swam, unconcerned with their intruder. They looked as if the only thought on their minds was escape. It was difficult to name creatures so alien and indifferent, and he had not been able to find any that he liked.

As the fish darted from side to side, the young boy wondered what he could do to make them more comfortable. They must get tired, he thought. And yet they do not seem sleepy. The room was filled with the signs of evening's approach. He lay in the darkness and remembered the way the ocean rocked endlessly the day his parents took him to the beach. Beside him the fish swirled once more in their bowl. Nearby, his father snored.

In the bedroom he found his dump truck beside a pile of soldiers and blocks, and brought it back to the living room. Carefully, so as

not to spill any water, he placed the fish bowl on the back of the truck. Then he lay back on the floor and began slowly pushing the truck back and forth. His father stirred slightly and then sank back into sleep.

The boy watched the water sloshing against the sides of the bowl, like the ocean, and was momentarily relieved. He adjusted the speed with which he moved the truck to a slower, more rhythmic pace. Then he realized that what they needed besides this comforting motion was salt. He remembered the stinging taste of the waves as they tried to knock him over, his mother beside him so he would not be afraid. One teaspoon, a little more rocking, and they would soon be asleep. His arm was tired, but he continued to push the truck back and forth in the darkened room. He knew he could not stop until they were resting, comfortable in their new home.

△

Six Poems

Cautionary Lines for a Thriftless Lady

For what?
A basket of napless wool mice, granny junk.
Not much return on what was spent.

There is a bottom.
There is absolute bottom,
a notion.

Between the two, place and notion,
silt—
a null zone.

You get there by scratching
the length of you against bottom.
Scant notion in that.

You scratch till you get through.
To silt.

Nothing up against you then.
You fall.

Only.

Toward an idea.

Any idea.

△

Real Hair

How come all youze got fairy hair
cuts cost 10 bucks wid bangs
Dey don' e'en shave ya neck
mudge less clip yaw nozdrils

I oughta cha'ge a sawbuck,
wea' high heel shoes
like some jigaboo

Shame,

shame on a nice fella like you

△

The Tunnel of Love

In a place of trampled peanuts
ends the hunt.
Dusk
brings on the lights and now
it is time for love.

But first a lemonade with ice
to startle
the hot brain
and sweeten the tongue.

Down the ramp—
our prow slams through the door
and we are in night.
Tickle my nose:
Aatchoo
Gesundheit

How happy we are
with the flimsy horrors

alone

moving slowly.

△

A February Idyll

Groundhog stuck out his nose
wrong.
Dumb hog, breathing
slow
in the half-light.

The gully's got you
good,
got you so

the only place to go

is out,
with no key or carfare
home.
Out, hog
and gone

to the studio lot
with chrome Daffy Duck
and Tokyo Rose.
Brother,
you dead.

△

Vancouver

Downstairs, Sal, of Sal's Paradise Club
stirs a fizz drink for a mummy blond.
—Thanks, Sal.
Black filthy rain it's raining
like a grudge is out,
but the neon mermaid over the fish place
looks best that way, in the rain.

Freighters are queuing in the bay,
1 2 34 5
waiting to dock.
A sailor aboard the lead ship, a Dane
sniffs saltchuck and lights himself a smoke.

He gazes out to the shimmering downtown spit.
He likes how tobacco and saltsea mix in his nose.

with Papa K

△

An Autumnal Sketch

What to make of them, the professors
in their little cars,
the sensitive men paunchy with drink
parked at the fence
where the field begins and the suburb ends?

If there is a mallard in the reeds
they will take it.
They will take it and make it their own,
something both more than a duck
and less.

They so badly want a poem,
these cagey and disheartened men
at the edge of the field.
And before they turn back for supper
they shall have one.

△

Sketch for A Primer of Present Day Poetic Practice

(1 hr. of continuous writing—aside from 6 telephone calls)
May 4, 1933

This is for the general reader, its purpose is to enhance or initiate his understanding of and pleasure in poetry in its present day modes.

Secondarily it is to establish a tentative basis for agreement or disagreement among poets today.

It will be a technical introduction to poetic practice, since there can be no pleasure in or understanding of poetry without technical knowledge.

To this end a working definition of that which is under discussion is offered:

Poetry is an attitude toward life as revealed in a sensitive (timely) balance between sound and meaning among words.

As a corollary, it is a matter not of words only but of language.

Poetry is not, to clarify the definition further, a matter of fixed and often archaic procedure according to sacro-sanct rule.

Discussing the definition further, since the effect produced by a poem is a matter of words (language) and since words are a variable material, becoming obsolete, varying in meaning as the world changes and general knowledge is modified (varying in emphasis even more than meaning), words being coined also from day to day—so

the balance to be sensitive varies also.

The tempo of a language may change, especially American from English, likewise.

This is the necessity for a new development of poetic practice from time to time.

Influence of Strict Rule

Failure to observe that poetry along with all other initiatives in similar fields (Music, painting, etc.) is an attitude toward life rather than a set of rules—has led to—

A removal of poetry from actual participation in the making of a present day economy—to the general impoverishment of the intelligence.

It is to break down this narrowing interpretation of what poetry is about that the revolt in poetry beginning with the present century began.

If it is cannonical that every line must begin with a capital letter and that rhyme is compulsory to the practice then poetry removes itself automatically from this description and should be sought elsewhere.

Precedent

However, such minor embellishments, along with much else, have not always been used.

Neither has the orthodox foot of counted syllables been always the rule.

On the contrary, latin poetry, such as that of Catullus, began its lines casually and used no rhyme.

Furthermore, both greek and latin poetry used quantity instead of stress as the basis of the foot.

Development

English poetry, because of its magnificent history, has fixed the practice of poetic precedent—in an unfortunate manner.

It has stressed a set of rules—as poetry. Also it has led the reader to believe by the picturesqueness or colorful or phantastic quality of its images that poetry is a matter of sentimental description.

Such images as—

1. Bare ruined choirs—etc.
2. Fairy casements opening on the foam.
3. Old, forgotten, far off things and battles long ago.

This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of the poetic intent.

Redefinition

If poetry is revealed by a sensitive balance—etc. then such images as those above quoted are mere accidents in a far greater and more comprehensive understanding: brilliant as they may be.

One thing they have hidden by their brilliance is the triviality of much of the melopoia or music in the words: the archaic acceptance of the stressed line is rigidly "poetry" today.

The beginning revolt in the foot

It is dissatisfaction with this rigidity of the foot—with its archaic implications which is at the basis of modern poetic practice.

The understanding of astro-physics, of political government, or economic rule—has vastly changed our minds.

It is necessary to understand these things if the balance among the

sounds and meanings of words which is poetry in any age can be grasped.

Today the world cannot come to a realization of its workability—its practice—until the confining rules of archaic precedent have first been abolished.

So poetry, to become active again, must first have broken up the narrow confines of its past.

Interlude

It is necessary to say here that—great poetry (poetry which initiated its greatness in some past day) remains great.

It is essential that the new base itself solidly on the lasting qualities of the old.

But to do so it must (base itself on what they did then not what they are now) do what men have always done, what the old did also: invent—to be.

Dante was a violent revolutionist. He quit latin for a colloquial dialect.

Chaucer—left french for a country speech.
Shakespeare fixed his language of the day—

It cannot have been otherwise to greatness: each enlarged his medium by his practice.

It is *this* which is the classic principle.

To continue

So today—it is to escape pedantry, to make poetry a practice touching its age—effectively, that the modern movement began.

The speech of America, the *Nuevo Mundo* of the great discoverers had much to do with this.

Whitman—who wrote all sorts of things on the page—wrote a "formless" poetry—so called, which popularized the term "free verse."

Revolt

This was the beginning of the break.

But there is no such thing as "free verse". It is a contradiction in terms. Verse means measure.

However, the free verse movement was important. It broke down the stressed foot and gave us an intuitive quantity in the foot, of which no one was fully aware.

The objective

The objective, which has come to the fore slowly—especially in the work of Ezra Pound—is becoming clearer today. It is the attack on the unit of all poetry the poetic foot.

The rigid stress which made poetry a curiosity, a museum piece—something precious, almost a phase of neurasthenic involvement—

It is this change which makes poetry available again as a practice of thought applicable to the day.

It opens up the material and must waken interest when it shall be mastered.

Very tentatively it may be defined as an adaptation of the movements of conversation—

. . . . .

It must not be overlooked however that all poetic practice is always—alive.

Nothing modern is so to the *exclusion* of the past—no more than modern physics can exclude Archimedes or astronomy Galileo—

But much is modified and much added—

Appreciation

So poetry should be listened to—for its movement among the words enhancing their meanings (significance).

To discover not a brilliant image but a balance—an attitude toward life which is political.

△

BOOK REVIEWS

Selected & New Poems. JIM HARRISON.
Drawings by Russell Chatham
Delta/Seymour Lawrence. 1982.

by HAYDEN CARRUTH

In the long, long elegy for the passing away of poetry that my life as editor and reviewer has been—and yes, this is how I regard it, let the optimistic workshop directors and foundation functionaries burble as they may: I know I am right, and sometimes it seems to me, I suppose inevitably, that because the decline has occurred during my active adulthood, I have somehow presided over it, instead of fighting it hammer and tongs all the way—in this long elegy the most constant motif, if not in what I have written then certainly in what I have thought and felt, has been the sorrow, the kind of terror that accompany absolute injustice done to individual human beings. I do not mean what would in other ages have been considered the normal decrement of historical winnowing; poets, like all others, have always fallen by the wayside. I mean the losses that have been forced by the progressive dissolution of our so-called civilization. I think of those who wrote honest, beautiful, important poems thirty-five or forty years ago, Ruthven Todd, Byron Vazakis, Reuel Denney, so many others, whose names linger, if they linger at all, only among a few of us fond and ravaged codgers. It is an oppressive discerning.

Letters to Yesenin, a poem in thirty sections and a postscript by Jim Harrison, was first published in 1973, when it was almost completely overlooked by critics and readers. It was republished about three years ago—maybe longer than that; I don't have the date handy—and again the silence was resounding. Now, in *Selected & New Poems*, we have a third chance. I don't know what serious expectation to attach to this. Naturally I hope for the best. But naturally also, in the circumstances, I fear the worst.

Yesenin, for those who may not know, was a Russian poet, born in 1895, whose works, both in their Slavic earthiness and their cosmopolitan raciness,

were somewhat sensationally successful in the years before, during, and just after the revolution. For a time he was married to Isadora Duncan. He was a cocaine addict. He hanged himself in 1925. He wrote his last poem in his own blood. For many years his poems were in official disfavor, but in the sixties they were approved for republication, and since then Yesenin's popularity in the Soviet Union has revived.

On the surface Harrison's poem is a sequence of personal letters to the dead Russian poet about the feasibility of suicide. But its real topic is the quality of life in Yesenin's time and our own, the similarities and the differences. Two remarks about the poem are crucial. First, it concludes against suicide. Secondly, it demonstrates that Yesenin's era, for all its turbulence, was easier than ours, because in ours we all must love and think in the perpetual anguish caused by the near certainty of planetary death before long.

The poem has many qualities, of course, but this latter, the way Harrison has embedded his entire vision of our predicament implicitly in the particulars of two poetic lives, his own and Yesenin's, is what makes the poem not only his best but one of the best in the past twenty-five years of American writing. It does one of the things that art must do: unflinchingly, it gives us our own image, and it does so in superbly controlled and concise language. This is difficult to show in a brief review. A long poem is a structure of momentum, which is its advantage over a short poem (as against its several disadvantages), and momentum cannot be exemplified in anything smaller than its wholeness. Nevertheless here is one section from the poem, number 12, chosen almost at random:

> I was proud at four that my father called me Little Turd of Misery.
> A special name somehow connected to all the cows and horses in
> the perpetual mire of the barnyard. It has a resonance to it un-
> known to president senator poet septic-tank cleaner critic butcher
> hack or baker liberal or snot, rightist and faker and faggot and
> cunt hound. A child was brought forth and he was named Little Turd
> of Misery and like you was thrown into the lake to learn how to
> swim, owned dogs that died stupidly but without grief. Why does
> the dog chase his broken legs in a circle. He almost catches them
> like we almost catch our unruly poems. And our fathers and uncles
> had ordinary pursuits, hunted and fished, smelled of tobacco and
> liquor, grew crops, made sauerkraut and wine, wept in the dark,
> chased stray cows, mended fences, were hounded as they say by
> creditors. Barns burned. Cabbages rotted. Corn died of drought

before its holy ears were formed, wheat flattened by hail and wind and
the soup grew only one potato and a piece of salt pork from its
center. Generations of slavery. All so we could fuck neurotically
and begin the day rather than end it drinking and dreaming of dead
dogs, swollen creeks with small bridges, ponds where cows are caught
and drown sucked in by the muck. But the wary boy catches fish
there, steals a chicken for his dog's monthly birthday, learns
to smoke, sees his first dirty picture and sings his first dirty
song, goes away, becomes deaf with song, becomes blinded by love,
gets letters from home but never returns. And his nights become less black
and holy, less moon blown and sweet. His brain burns away like
gray paraffin. He's tired. His parents are dead or he is dead
to his parents. He smells the smell of a horse. The room is
cold. He dims the light and builds a noose. It works too well.

Why has *Letters to Yesenin* failed to reach an audience so far, in spite of its relevance and power and of its author's considerable reputation? I think for the same reason that people no longer read the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, even though these are more germane and helpful today than they were thirty years ago. Harrison's poem is tough, descriptively and prescriptively. It does not spare us one laceration of our enslavement to terror. It says to us that life is unendurable and that we can endure. It dares to suggest the possibility of reason and especially of hardihood. Americans knew these possibilities once, but no more. Our civilization has fled, seeking escape in every direction at once, like a flock of hens when the hawk stoops. Well, we have no civilization. What we have is a mush. In discouragement Harrison turned to writing fiction, which was tough too, but of the macho, escapist kind, I think, a serious enough deviation, such as one can find in some of his poetry as well, though not in *Letters to Yesenin*, and he made a pile of money, blew it, and now, or at any rate the last I heard, is back on his farm in northern Michigan, enduring. I urge everyone to buy his new book. Read the rest of the poetry as you will; I had intended to write about it, e.g., how the early poems seem influenced by Levertov, how the "ghazals" of his third book are quite fine but lack the intensity and integration of those by Adrienne Rich; but Harrison is his own best and most percipient critic ("I saw Christ this summer / rising over the Absaroka Range. / Of course I was drunk. / I carry my vices to the wilderness"), a quality of his work that makes acceptable much that would otherwise be offensive. In any case he came fully into his own in his major poem, *Letters to Yesenin*. Read it and

reread it (as I have over the years). Give yourself to its wholeness, to all its elements, thematic, poetic, technical, philosophical, or whatever. It is a truly organic work, and I use the term in the sense it had when it was originally applied to poetry, meaning not a poem in a certain mode but a system of energies, unanalysable yet functional in the reader's sensibility. We have many ways, if we are courageous, to apprehend our condition, and at this stage in the progress of danger no intelligent person would be assertive enough to say that one way is indispensible. But *Letters to Yesenin* is as good, as esthetically and morally efficacious, as any I know, and a great deal better than most. ∆

A Renaissance of Women Writers

Psyche Reborn, Susan S. Friedman, Indiana University Press, 1981; *H.D. The Life of an American Poet*, Janice S. Robinson, Houghton Mifflin, 1982; *HERmione*, H.D., New Directions, 1981; *The Gift*, H.D., New Directions, 1982; *Hedylus*, H.D., Black Swan, 1980; *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D., City Lights, 1983; *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, Mina Loy, Jargon Society, 1982; *The Poems of Laura Riding*, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Persea, 1980; *Progress of Stories*, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Dial, 1982; *The Yale Gertrude Stein*, Gertrude Stein, Yale University Press, 1980.

by JED RASULA

Imagine the following. The time is the present. Joyce's *Ulysses* was out of print for 40 years, and the reprint is now also out of print. *The Cantos* have never been gathered together in a single volume, and only the snatches printed in Pound's *Selected Poems* are commonly available. Stevens' *Collected Poems* has been out of print since the Fifties; nothing by Zukofsky

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Special thanks are due to Ken Irby, and to Robert Bertholf, director of the Poetry/ Rare Books Collection at SUNY Buffalo, for encouragement, clues, and access to scarce materials.

or Williams has been in print since the Thirties; cummings remains unknown, his work buried in magazines half a century old. Eliot's late plays are in print, but the poetry, like that of cummings, is only to be found in old issues of *The Dial*, etc. Lawrence and Faulkner, highly regarded in their day, can only be read in prized first editions.

It's a chilling fantasy. Exactly the opposite is the case, of course. But it serves to bring home the appalling out of print status of the great modernist women writers. Replace the names above with those of Gertrude Stein, H.D., Mary Butts, Laura Riding, Mina Loy, Kay Boyle, Edith Sitwell, Dorothy Richardson, and the preposterous scenario is, regrettably, the true story. These women published something on the order of 150 books, of which scarcely more than a dozen are in print. Butts and Richardson are out of print altogether. Sitwell and Boyle are close on their heels in this regard. The slender portion of Stein in print is shameful. And only in the past two years has the publishing world shown signs of life in reprinting H.D., Riding and Loy.

The unavailability of these women's work is an accurate index of the sensibility—or lack of it—of contemporary readers and educators. The immediate temptation is to see male-influenced reading habits. But the sad fact is that feminists have ignored the modernist women writers as blissfully as the men have. It's easy to fantasize those Big Male Omnivores of the modernist generation—Pound, Williams, Stevens, Joyce, Eliot—edging the women out of the picture. But only a little research makes it clear that the first three decades of the 20th century came as close to anything on record for equal participation by women and men in the innovative writing of an era. Look at the pages of *The Dial*, *The Little Review*, *Poetry* (and remember that these magazines were edited by women!), *Transatlantic Review*, *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* and *transition*: not only do the women appear as frequently as the men, but the whole context makes it obvious that there was nothing perfunctory or 'representative' about their presence. They were essential.

An English professor I know commented to a female colleague on the appearance of the two recent books on H.D. She seemed uninterested, and pressed for a response, dismissingly said "H.D., oh, she's a man's poet." This is the only clue I have as to why Janice Robinson and Susan Friedman try so desperately to make H.D. a heroine in their books. If that *is* the atti-

tude one runs up against in academia, apparently the only ground for scholarly discussion is hyperbolic distortion. If H.D. is a "man's poet," then the only way to reclaim her for women is to inflate her personal story so that the texts artificially expand and become legible again. The first half of Friedman's *Psyche Reborn*, in fact, is a somewhat misapplied feminist manifesto, in which H.D.'s blessing by Freud is seen as a redemption of her primal female contours, from which she rises up to the formidible task of her heroic late work, *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. Friedman is actually much more compelling when, in the second half of her book, she addresses the question of H.D.'s involvement in occult matters. Her documentation is extensive, the nuances of her enquiry refreshing, and we're left with an H.D. more substantial, insistently herself, and cunning than anything in the H.D./Freud portrait would have led one to expect.

Janice Robinson suggests a less programmatic role to the meetings with Freud, while retaining a beautifully balanced account of the significance for both parties. Freud's science, developed for over three decades by the time H.D. met him, was intended for the average person; but Freud's *art* applied only to a few, and the great Freudian achievement really lay in the privilege of mutual intensity like that established between he and H.D. If her *Tribute* is the most beautiful book yet written on Freud, it's because their work together pierced through the sometimes tendentious and doctrinaire aspects of 'analysis,' drawing them together in the shared recognition that archaic forces were written plainly across all human endeavor. Robinson writes, "H.D. believed that the concrete experience of a fully conscious life is in fact the drama of life writ large—it is really the enactment of the whole drama of nature." In *Helen in Egypt* the mythic epiphanies permeate the lifelong personal dimension that psychoanalysis had helped H.D. reactivate as nothing less than myth itself. But while Robinson nourishes our perceptions of the life writ large in H.D.'s summative epic, she is drawn irresistibly to a literalization of figural possibilities. So Achilles becomes D.H. Lawrence, Odysseus becomes Pound, Paris becomes Aldington, and so on. Her disposition is unmistakable from the start: she reads the early Imagist poems as psychological hieroglyphs. This is so artfully done that it's breathtaking when she reads a textual interplay between Lawrence's *Escaped Cock* and H.D.'s (unpublished) *Pilate's Wife*. Since the thrust of her book is in the gradual unfolding of the DHL/H.D. relationship (and her gothic romance

trump: a hint at a Lawrentian paternity for H.D.'s daughter), Robinson's meticulous textual readings take on added significance, since her documentation of the actual life is largely unsubstantiated guesswork. But a 'close reading' of archival material can be suspect; the uses put to the same unpublished manuscripts by Friedman and Robinson vary so wildly that one wonders about the liberties being taken by both women.

This is a particularly awkward time for these two critical studies to appear. Not only are the bulk of H.D.'s writings unavailable, but the facts of her life are remote to say the least. Barbara Guest's full-scale biography is not due to appear until 1983 from Doubleday. Meanwhile Robinson's book is being falsely marketed as a biography (readers will not be fooled, it's so obviously a critical reading of the work). Both Robinson and Friedman rely heavily on unpublished writing and, grateful as one is for the opportunity to lap it up in snatches, we're really only getting shards, so—in keeping with H.D.'s reputation as a Hellenist—her work remains in the category of Sappho and the other poets of antiquity known only in fragments.

While H.D.'s magnificent late poetry is in print, the poems that made her reputation are unavailable (*Collected Poems*, *Red Roses For Bronze*, and another hundred pages in magazines). Of the three novels she published, *Palimpsest* is out of print (even the reprint), but Black Swan will reprint *Bid Me To Live* in 1983 (as well as the verse drama, *Hippolytus Temporizes*) and they have already done a corrected edition of *Hedylus* (less a novel than a stylized psychological blitzkrieg, a *prose dexterity* of extraordinary insistence). New Directions seems embarked on the task of printing the many novels that are in manuscript at the Beinecke: *HERmione* first—presumably to pursue public interest in the Pound/H.D. relationship recalled in *End To Torment* and painfully rendered here—and recently *The Gift*—contemporaneous with the London blitz and the composition of *Trilogy*—a book to rank with Mary Butts' *Crystal Cabinet* as one of the lovely mature womanly evocations of late 19th century girlhood. The stage now seems set, with the imminence of Guest's biography and the prospect of further Black Swan and New Directions books (even City Lights is into the act, issuing the essay *Notes on Thought and Vision*), for H.D.'s legibility to be encouragingly restored in time for her centennary in 1986.

Luckily for H.D., her books have always been before the public in some form. Not so with Mina Loy, elusive with her work even while alive. But

reading Mina Loy is one of the most direct encounters with modernism—so uninhibited is her writing, in fact, that reading it is like defusing an old but still live bomb. There's no mistaking her idiom. Where she strains she resembles an overintelligent writing student tortuously avoiding all simplicity and plain speech. But that's rare. Reading through *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, I feel more and more convinced that her angle on the *mot juste* was entirely her own, that she was a breed of one—the only English language futurist. Her "Aphorisms on Futurism" are less forceful in their overt connection to the Italian movement than such other manifestos as "International Psycho-Democracy" and "Auto-Facial Construction." Her skills as polemicist and aphorist have been utterly neglected; but consider the following, drawn from "Aphorisms on Modernism":

> MODERNISM is a prophet crying in the wilderness that Humanity is wasting its time.
> CONSCIOUSNESS originated in the nostalgia of the universe for an audience.
> THE individual is the inhibition of infinity.
> IMPACT with beauty is immortality.

Mina Loy was obviously as valuable an asset to the spread of Futurism in English as Marinetti himself, yet one wonders about the extent to which her presence was compromised by being his lover, and later Papini's. Despite her satires of both men in poems (of Papini: "His adolescence was all there was of him / Whatever was left was rather awkward"), there is a feeling that she was never comfortable competing in the aggressive arena of modernism in any of its manifestations. In the Twenties, even as she was being recognized by Pound and others as one of the very few 'originals' among poets, her withdrawal was underway, precipitating a lacuna in the consciousness of English modernism only this publication of *The Last Lunar Baedeker* begins to fill in. What is more, it establishes her in the evolutionary episode of modern literature as nothing less than a Missing Link, exemplar of a crucial node between one species of consciousness and another. "Protoplasm was raving mad / Evolving us" she writes in a love song.

If the dynamics of the machine represented to the Futurists a prismatic display of universal force, Mina Loy took the energy in its more organic dimension, while still retaining in the construction of her poems the unsentimental precisions of mechanical laws. Williams' poems-as-machines is

more applicable to her work even than his own. Certainly the words encountered appear in no other poetry I've read: agamogenesis, for instance, or cymophanous, acolytian, or the carnose horologe of the ego. Such words are hallucinatory fossils, and by comparison words like footle and knouts sound familiar even if you've never heard them before. In the strict sense, hers are the only 'science fiction' poems in the language. What appears to be impersonal at times is really a kind of second-stage rocket ejection:

> No love or the other thing
> Only the impact of lighted bodies
> Knocking sparks off each other
> In chaos

This stanza is the basic creed of the "Psychic Evolution" elaborated in Loy's manifesto for "International Psycho-Democracy":

> This thing called *Life* which seems to be the impact of luminous bodies, knocking sparks off one another in chaos, will be transformed through Psycho-Democratic evolution from a war between good and evil, i.e., (between beneficent and painful chance) to a competition between different kinds of good: (beneficent spontaneities).

Nothing short of beneficent spontaneity can account for the force of Mina Loy's attraction to Arthur Craven, and the rigorous, even brutal life wandering about in Mexico with him which "for the time that I accompanied him seemed a veritable mastication of space."

The Jargon presentation of Mina Loy in her native dimension is cause for celebration. There are plates of her visual work (genuinely visionary), of her (she was a beauty, with a curious resemblance to Isadora Duncan), a lengthy introduction augmented by abundant biographical data in a separate chronology of her life; and of her writing, there is a section of manifestos, essays and aphorisms, and of course the complete poems. Complete? Well, not exactly. The editor, Roger Conover, cites length as the reason for excluding the verse drama "The Pamperers," yet it took up only 14 of *The Dial*'s pages in 1920, and is far more significant than the "Two Plays" Conover includes. Only 8 lines are included from "Songge Byrd," Loy's unfinished verse biography of Isadora Duncan: is that all that survives? One would either like to see more or know more. The most serious aberration in the editorial complement to *The Last Lunar Baedeker* is the notes, which are an unpredictable

combination of vital information and absolutely irrelevant bibliographic data. And for the single critical tool one would like to have—a citation of the known dates of composition for the texts—one is referred to Virginia Koudis' critical study (a fine book, but no reason to exclude that information here, where it counts).

Which brings us, in conclusion, to the poems themselves. The laws of physical dynamics governing them make their flaws noticeable, in that they show signs of eccentric behavior like a damaged orbiting pattern, disequilibrium, etc. Which is at the same time to say, and stress, that most of the poems attain a technical perfection so unique that the book as a whole can only be regarded as the test site of a new aesthetic. Consequently, Loy's commentary poems on others' work reveal a mode of poetry as analytically precise as any critical prose yet developed, particularly in the pieces on Brancusi, Joyce and Stein. It's not clear why all the poems classed as Satires are so grouped: "Parturition" is an awesome rendition of childbirth, with only a touch of satire in its closing lines. But in the end one is willing to go along with that generic imprint because the force of the woman's intelligence makes everything appear a satire of itself anyway. Her large-scale autobiographical satire, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," here in its entirety for the first time, constitutes a formidible challenge to anyone's conception of the long poem, the *proof* of modernism in most of its incarnations. In all, the poems fill 260 pages in this large, beautifully printed and designed volume, which is indeed a time bomb set ticking half a century ago, now matured to a hefty throb for the intrepid to handle.

Laura Riding was regarded as an incendiary device from the outset of her publishing career in the mid-Twenties. It is in fact appalling to read early reviews of her writing, to be so blatantly confronted with what is essentially male indignance at what is taken to be an over-cerebral woman poet. To read Laura Riding *is* to feel oneself in the presence of a relentless and aggressive intellect, but to gain perspective on her case it's useful to read those early reviews (along with her original publications) to see the deplorable attitudes she was up against. For the fact is that she has followed one of the singularly pure paths of writing attempted in this century, against which the work of many others seems a momentary dalliance.

In a poetic atmosphere sobered by T.S. Eliot's august presence and pronouncements, Riding's early work was almost certain to appear as an affront

to the self-proclaimed dignity poetry had arrived at. She sprang, like Athena, fully armed: by 1930 (only four years after her first book) she had not only a half dozen books of poetry to her credit, but *Contemporaries and Snobs*, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, *Experts Are Puzzled* and the collaborative critical studies with Robert Graves. The playful but acutely pointed episodes of an unfolding poetics in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* simply did not fit in with any line of thinking about poetry in 1928. In fact, Riding's suggestion that "if you must write yourself, write *writing-matter*, not *reading-matter*" has as its proper climate the Seventies more than the Twenties. Poetry, she maintained, "is perhaps the only human pursuit left still capable of developing anti-socially," and for this reason she mistrusted the pictorialization and musification of poetry, which accomodates "the propagandist tribal expression of a society without any real tribal sense."

Her only contemporary in the Twenties and Thirties I can conceivably associate her with is Martin Heidegger, though I've seen nothing to indicate that she now knows or ever knew of his writing. But when, in the introduction to the new edition of her 1938 collected poems, she writes "Poetry bears in itself the message that it is the destiny of human beings to speak the meaning of being . . ." she is making precisely the point Heidegger made over and over again. Riding's critique of poetry was based on the perception that—as she expressed it in the original preface to the 1938 collection—"In poem-writing and poem-reading the stirring up of the poetic faculties has been a greater preoccupation than their proper use . . ." From that point, the issues have been further complicated by Riding's apparent abdication of poetry forty years ago, along with her unwillingness to indicate by way of example what the 'proper use' of the poetic faculty is. That her poetry is generally assumed to be her example of proper use really muddles the issue, both because it makes her into a monster of self-righteousness and because it obscures the fact that her work is—as Pound said of *The Cantos*—"the record of a struggle." This matter might be clarified, however, if we were to regard her effort of the past forty years as a practice of *not* being a poet, in order—as she attests in *The Telling*—to come to a certain articulation (rather than simply an expression) of being and truth. Riding is a notably troubling contemporary figure because she has refused to comply with the modern demands to deliver reading-matter to the public, and worse, she overstepped popular conceptions of 'the poet' by conducting a rigorous en-

quiry within the scope of her own poetry into questions of being and truth which she, as a poet, was patently unqualified to do. That was to be the philosopher's domain, and should a poet attempt to harvest a crop on that turf, he must, like Wallace Stevens, conduct his labor with all the suitable rhetorical flourishes so that the serious workers know they have a migrant in their midst.

The Telling and the recent introductions to the reprinted books of poems and stories provide a basic reorientation to Riding as a figure in the story of writing in our time. For they make clear the underlying quest-nature of her always evident sense of responsibility to language, and in so doing throw into relief the positive values of her earlier writing. Certainly there are aggravations inherent in the poems which could lead an undiscerning reader into thinking that Riding's sole purpose was (misdirected) satire, or a spiteful assault on conventional lyricism. At times, in a melodramatic costuming, the poems read like ghastly corruptions out of the secret heart of Palgrave, hideously distorted recitations from *A Child's Garden of Verses*. The preface to *Poems, A Joking Word* (1930) is like Winnie the Pooh and Heidegger declaiming a litany at a Black Mass presided over by Gertrude Stein. The refrain, "Poems are doom becoming doom," while related to Rilke and to Heidegger's *Angst*, sounds silly. Fortunately, the idiom of her ontological explorations did not otherwise aspire to the flippancy of that particular preface, and the introduction to the original 1938 *Collected Poems* is a masterfully concise, stimulating and still altogether relevant assessment of the motives for reading and writing poetry.

The Persea edition of the 1938 collection, *The Poems of Laura Riding*, reprints the book intact, with the addition of a new preface and supplementary expository materials by Riding. It is a collection the size of Wallace Stevens', and deserves at least the attention afforded a reading of his work (to which hers is a sort of uncanny twin). Riding's poetry constitutes so sizeable a challenge to poetry itself—written from within, so to speak—that to ignore or belittle her achievement is to relegate the art of poetry itself to that of any other 'reading matter,' useful only for lighter diversions. Every poem is an authentic—not an artificial or staged—struggle. The nature of her struggle will become fully evident only when something like a variorum edition of the poems is available. It should be stressed that the 1938 collection was but the latest in a series of arrangements Riding made of her

poems. It is the largest and most challenging, but it shouldn't distract us from the many other, and varied, contexts she provided for her work. Each publication of a poem of Riding's is worth following for the revisions, which are miracles of tuning, tightening, clarifying, and—in the context of continual relocations—amplifying. In each of her books the sequentiation of the poems constitutes the story, or calibrates its telling. Many of the poems in the 1938 collection had appeared in not one but two prior books, each time in an arrangement designed to stimulate certain readings and subdue others. When she wrote, in 1938, that she "ommitted those poems which seemed to fall outside the story" she indicated not only that the collection at hand constituted a story, as such, but that the earlier collections manifested such occasions themselves. "To go to poetry is the most ambitious act of the mind," she wrote. *The Poems of Laura Riding* is a continual testament to the truth of that remark.

Ambition is so variable a quality that what may seem unlimited and forbidding in Riding's poems becomes accessible, finite and charming in *Progress of Stories*. For readers seriously willing to struggle with writing, willing to allow the nature of the struggle to continue to unfold through their own reading, *The Poems of Laura Riding* and *Progress of Stories* are some of the most *useful* books of the century. They feel, to me, like companion books, and surely the mutual excellence of both makes them compatible. But *Progress of Stories* has an advantage over the poems in that it presents more varied surfaces and more obviously enjoyable segments. There are stories in fact which can be read fairly light-headedly, though part of the overall ingenuity of the stories' "progress" is to accustom the reader to more and more spacey kinds of light-headedness. So that, to read the final group of stories, one needs the physical preparation of the earlier stories much as astronauts need the artificial simulation of weightlessness before going into orbit. So thoroughly does Riding represent different modes of storytelling in *Progress*—from personal-history adolescent maturing, to social portraits, to Voltairean cosmological travelogues, to fairy-tales and even Beckett-like pure ontological irruptions (all predating Beckett of course, or any other contemporary fiction writing which it may appear to resemble)—that the feeling for the reader is that of having in hand as *complete* a book as a book of stories can be.

Because *Progress of Stories* struck me as so singular and perfect a book in

its own right, I had doubts about the incorporation into this new Dial edition of earlier stories from *Anarchism Is Not Enough* and *Experts are Puzzled*. But having the *Progress* augmented this way is useful not only in the expanded portrait it gives of Riding's storytelling abilities and her early concept as practiced, but because it occasions reflections by her which are contemporary (1982) on all the different aspects of the stories assembled here, along with a difficult but potent preface to the edition as a whole. In the progress of these stories we enter a domain of the "one thing so strange that it makes man say not 'How strange it is!' but 'How strange am I!' "—a place in which not only anyone, but any *thing*, any event, condition or mode of being can come into play as a character. It is good to be in the company again of Eve and Lilith, Miss Banquet, the story pig, in such places as Port Huntlady, Cosmania, and the Playground. The stories all arouse "the delight that can be felt in the good fortune that . . . there can be telling of a story or stories that, though told as not being and known not to be truth, flush the expanded word-scenery of the mind with a truth-like radiance" (from the 1982 preface).

Getting Laura Riding back in print was Laura Jackson's own decision. But Mary Butts died in 1937 with all her books still available, and only two have since been reprinted. She is the enduring example of the fallibility of the publishing world: even the great ones can vanish. It's no use listing her friends, supporters, and enthusiasts of the work—all the memoirs and histories of post-World War I bohemian Paris glow with the mention of her name—for Mary Butts' books are nearly all inaccessible to readers. You won't find copies of her books in libraries or for sale. But her novels—*Ashe of Rings* (1926), *Armed With Madness* (1928), *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932), *The Macedonian* (1933) and *Scenes From The Life of Cleopatra* (1935)—are as unique an accomplishment in the form as those of John Cowper Powys (to cite another long neglected but lately come back in vogue). But Butts' major achievement is in the stories—*Speed the Plough* (1923), *Several Occasions* (1932) and *Last Stories* (1938)—which, taken together, would make a book the size of *Ulysses* or *The Cantos* and a candidate for the same shelf.

The neglect into which Butts' work has fallen is probably attributable to her personal dynamism (remarked wistfully by all her friends), which for those who knew her overshadowed her writing. She is at her strongest as an

artist of the waste land, of fertility and sterility perpetually at war even in a 'postwar' era. But Eliot captured that territory (Mary Butts noted in her diary that he always seemed to snatch her titles out from under her—"The Waste Land" and "The Sacred Wood" would be quintessential Butts). For those unfamiliar with her work, think of her then as being as much the artist of the waste land as Eliot, augmented by a native visionary capacity (she was raised a descendant of William Blake's patron, and a room at home was filled with some of his greatest pictures) and an adventurousness Eliot lacked (in fact, Butts spent a summer as a protege of Aleister Crowley at Cepphalu, picking up his addiction to heroin as well as helping him clarify his book on magick). Now that the other major women modernists are being reprinted, I can think of no more significant figure still in need of recovery than Mary Butts.

Gertrude Stein certainly has all the fame Mary Butts lacks, yet even her work suffers from an inordinate degree of unavailability. When even the reprints are out of print it's hopeless. Of three dozen titles only a half dozen are currently available. *Operas and Plays*, *Useful Knowledge*, *Portraits and Prayers* and *Four In America* are only a few of the sizeable books one might hope to see reprinted. Then there's the Yale eight-volume posthumous collection, $25 apiece in library reprint editions, any title of which is as essential as most of the books Stein published in her lifetime. Richard Kostelanetz has assembled a 464 page selection from the Yale books, called *The Yale Gertrude Stein*. It is, at the moment, as good a place to start with her work as any. Admittedly it puts you face to face with her most difficult experimental modes, but there's no sense trying to avoid that. Given the bulk of the Yale material (2500 pages), Kostelanetz could either have sifted relentlessly for a sparkling catch of smaller texts, or go straight after size wherever he found it. He chose the latter course, a difficult decision but much to be commended, as *The Yale Gertrude Stein* will give you unabridged "Lifting Belly," "Patriarchal Poetry," and "Stanzas in Meditation," three of Stein's most awesome extended compositions. Other shorter (but still 30 pages each) essentials include "Brim Beauvais," "Subject-Cases," "More Grammar For a Sentence," and "A Sonatina Followed By Another." Kostelanetz' selection only falters, in fact, in the shortest pieces (one or two pages each)—a relatively insignificant flaw, as so much of the book consists of the long works cited above—and in an over-reliance for his

selection on the volume *Bee Time Vine* to the relative neglect of the riches of *Painted Lace* and *As Fine As Melanctha*. Needless to say, Yale still has plenty of material left for additional selections (hopefully they will use it). *The Yale Gertrude Stein* is, in the classic phrase, a step in the right direction. It points us in the direction of the recovery of an era that may unhesitatingly be called a renaissance of women writers. △

Five Aces and Independence. JOHN THORPE.
Tombouctou. 1981.

by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK

Lest it be overlooked in all the rush to rattle out a theory of language in chips and systems: this peculiarly human document by John Thorpe. Buried within are some of the most politically responsible poems of our time.

There are apparently two separate works, though bound together for more than convenience. The concentration of the first, *Five Aces*, seems sociological, drifting through America, cherry-picking, making do, surviving. Poems like "Ray Sharpe's Ranch" or "Tuesday," where the following passage occurs, might be singled out:

> Then in front of me an old man
> signed for foodstamps using the wrong end of the pen.
> I asked him when he ate last. "Nuttin just a coop
> a coffee dis moning," he said. You getting much of
> a cane crop this year? No sir. Only north forty.
> We switch to tobacco. Leaf wrapper? Nawsuh,
> Burley. And the waitress says
> "I *hope* I heard you say please!"

Very competent field-work, but not yet unique. That comes in the second half, *Independence.*

Among the poems there are "found" documents, letters to girlfriends, diary entries, notes passed in class. The highlight is a series of instamatic

portraits of pure American, late second-millennium adolescence, without subjective interference or adult "approval," all the caprice and doubt, the monolithic despair and poignancy of the age. They are school assignments or overheard lunchroom conversations that Thorpe with madly, morally darting eyes copies down surreptitiously in corridors, pressed between lockers, at the vending machines, in the arcade, in the back of the bus, in the subway between 2 and 4. Or else he is the multiple personality of an entire Head Start class come of age, as the photograph on the collection's cover suggests: a kindergarten graduation, boys and girls, the blend of colors and races, the smiles and eyes of youth—only, having read the poems—about to become as vacant as the storefronts they pass in the culture waiting to receive them.

No particular part of the country is given priority, but the voices come from all over—the Grand Concourse, San Bernardino High School, Western Pennsylvania. Vox populi. They are the voice of the people—nothing more or less. As grand and extensive as the phrase implies, and as trivial. But also timeless and tribal. It's as if the ancestral voices, smudged like ancient fingerprints on the shopping bins of discount marts, counters of clip-on ties and rubber flip-flops, started speaking. Only, these voices are ancestral to our immediate future, before the century lets out. This is the generation set to rattle at the social security gates.

A lot of hope rides on the titles—"Waaaaa, feed me, feed me," "Freckles? Ooo—I hate freckles! They're SICK!" (this last crazily concerns one of Thorpe's own ancestors, an 18th-19th century Congregationalist minister-farmer). The spark jumping the gap between title and text is our recognition of the wit controlling the whimsy of the event. The final poem is a motto in two lines (saved with characteristic modesty till the end, until it has earned its place): "The mind of the people is a better author / The mind of the people's a better publisher"—answering any doubt whether there can be political poetry without polemic or radical linguistic experimentalizing.

There is nothing polished about the poems. If there is any tradition of rhetoric, it is verity naif. But how else is youth but unkempt, keepers of themselves? There are plaints of the near inarticulate (from which we are *all* only a hair's breadth—or hare's breath!—away, in the face of deep or prolonged emotions), such as "This perfume is my only friend" or "What of it I could remember," which ends:

I got up, my head hurt, I still had on my lashes.
Sat on the toilet, blood on my pants.
Oh bastard. So this is the magic carpet ride huh.
Some boogie. I want real love.

Something is placed over the voices—a hand, as over a mouth of horror? Or is it something in the sound system; is the hand holding the mike too close, or too far away? Some tone grid? Something is filtering the voices. The grille of a pearwood confessional? Is it Thorpe himself?

He is certainly a picker, a crow for stories. There is the hilarious stone-faced one about five GIs and five Navy gobs and five Marines and a single thin dark-haired girl who all spend the night together in the same hotel room, or the utter blues of the final lines of "Good news, Mac, the Feds want to see you": "So if you see a street that disappears / ask it if it wants another man."

The voice of the people, the voice exuded from the flesh, released from the living glands. Voices overheard in snatches, not flow, not all from the same source or occasion—what in part adds to their universality and realism: they appear with all the interruptions and fade-ins and -out of life, sometimes several simultaneously. Many of the voices are of very tired women. Gum-clicks between the Browning-like monologues, high-pitched nasal teasing, or defeat so stale you can smell it on the breath. It's all poetry, language made selectively conscious, as in "One kid":

One night a kid was thinking
in bed
about something.
It hit him like a rock—
Poetry, poetry, poetry!

There is nothing quite like it. The capturing of speech in all its color and vagary is common and plentiful (any reader has favorite instances), but here it is especially welcome. The speech is homely, the harmonics unequalized, including the stultifications of adolescents on the verge of articulateness. All one's own adolescence comes flooding in. Agh! was I like that? We all squirm together and sweat a little and sigh with recognition (with redemption), overhearing the voices in *Five Aces and Independence*.

I hope that Thorpe will be kept in mind in any discussion of "voice" and authenticity in recent American poetry. His fifth ace is the joker, very wild.

Cap of Darkness. DIANE WAKOSKI.
Black Sparrow Press. 1980.
The Magician's Feastletters. DIANE WAKOSKI.
Black Sparrow Press. 1982.

by PAUL CHRISTENSEN

It is very difficult to write about getting older in America. Few poets have done well by the theme, although many have tried to perceive the process as it happened to them. Robert Lowell is perhaps our best poet of middle age so far; Donald Hall has engaged the subject in a recent good book, *Kicking the Stones*, but both poets are the exceptions in a multitude of writers wary of the subject. Aging, as Wakoski shows in *Cap of Darkness*, is a process by which you become invisible. Poets will sometimes cling to a poignant emotion of their youth to evade or ignore aging: sexual desire, as with Kenneth Rexroth and Robert Graves; loneliness, as with Frost; order, as with Wallace Stevens. When the young T.S. Eliot wrote about aging, he only saw his youth projected to later life, and thought aging meant merely deeper frustration with women. Other poets lose the pretensions of youth and become, for the first time, truly young; Pound, who was everyone's master when young, and who lost his vanity in old age, wrote his most lyrical language as a captive at Pisa.

Aging is a cap of darkness, something you come to wear unknowingly at first, but as time goes on you sense has begun to envelope you. You become a ghost to others whom you might have desired once or still might; you are invisible to those who would otherwise need to compete against you for the loaves and fishes of a career. As you grow older, according to Wakoski, you imperceptibly step aside from the march of fellow proles who only know the terms of their struggles and pursue them fiercely. There is no quarter for reflection or recognition of one's changing circumstances. As she remarks in "Aging," she "can only wonder / why there is such a general rejection of winter."

Wakoski surveys herself for signs of age as though she diagnosed the symptoms of a plague. Aging, as discovered in the details of her own body, presents her with an irrefutable set of new circumstances, the first subtle messages of far-off death; and on the other hand, she comes to see the good

in age, its own peculiar transports and excursions beyond a world of slender sexual partners with beautiful faces. Wakoski begrudgingly admits her own aging is a new experience, a different route of her odyssey, something unknown and now unfolding to her, which puts her feet on ground that is pathless, terrifying, suspenseful; in time, perhaps, it will become a spiritually thrilling search, a leap out of a threadbare reality of mere survival.

In *Cap of Darkness*, Wakoski wants to claim aging as a proper subject of poetry, partly because of the distrust and contempt others feel for this passage beyond youth and productive energy, and because it is her own immediate experience. It is just here, at this specific tension between her writing and society, that she has found the new lyric of the times: she has discovered where the public reality leaves off, and how her verse continues a chronicle of life that illuminates a forbidden world. In "A Dissertation on Smallness," she approaches her theme from a fundamental perspective: admitting she grows older, even when that fact is adamantly denied by her own friends and admirers. In "Cap of Darkness," she describes herself as "fighting the unknown, the invisible, the / ignorance of vision" in others. The denials of age are everywhere; one must break through to the recognition of his own aging with willful concentration:

> Terribly aware of looking fat, middle-aged, and dowdy,
> I marvel when people come up to me after a program and say,
> "You look wonderful," or
> "You haven't changed a bit";
> photos must lie.
> Or most people don't see others.
> For, I do not look the same,
> and my health is poor,
> and surely,
> someone must notice that I
> who always looked like a young girl
> now look
> like a middle-aged woman?
>
> ("Memory")

Finally, as she puts it, she can "acknowledge vanity / to discard it," but asks worriedly, "Is loss of vanity / death?" The irony of the question is that in discarding a vanity, one gets to live again, even if it is on the north side of the hill, on the path to death. "I begin, momentarily," she writes in another

poem, "to understand death, though never violence, never shattering." Wakoski delicately fits into place her "cap of invisibility," a little frightened, a little intimidated by the thought of death, by the signs of change in her face and form, and yet she wears it now, and sees, like a poet, what the new world of her life has to offer. In her recognition of aging, she finds doors to other realities she had not known existed before: as here, in this accidental discovery of silence:

> Sometimes the silence
> is so much more than we deserve
> like a pocket of time,
> a crystal room we walk into
> and suddenly find
> as in the fairy tale.
> We don't any longer see a door.
> The room of mirrors where every wall
> looks like an entrance or exit
> but neither is actually there . . .

Now the sum of her life is recognized as memory, which worries her. She is not fully reconciled to her changes in this book of poems; this shift of attitude, of status, vision, bearings will require much more thought, much more change within the mental interiors of her self before these hesitations will give way. Indeed, this drama of life-change is especially poignant for the Western woman, who, unlike the Asian woman, has no sympathy from her society, no religion to justify this passage, no cultural definition of the other half of her life. Wakoski is uncomfortable at catching herself "recalling," reminiscing, dredging up situations that had glistened in other books of her lyric chronicle, and resents "how we work our memories to death." She asks,

> What do you do
> when you find that nothing in your life
> has meant the same thing it meant to you
> to anyone else?
> What do you do
> when you are almost
> as afraid of life as
> you are of death.
>
> ("What Do You Do?")

Cap of Darkness is only the most tentative effort to seek reconciliation

with age; *The Magician's Feastletters* is not merely the sequel to *Cap of Darkness*, but a celebration of this theme in much bolder poetry. It occurs to Wakoski in several of the poems that she has been waiting to reach middle age in order to write her best work—that "experience and memory are my real roots," not the fearful prospect of losing touch, as she complained in her previous book. She is relieved at the thought that all the love she longed for is now a dream of lovers. "Would I rather fantasize / than touch?" she asks at the end of "The Dark Procession, Reviewed," which closes the second section of her book, "Winter." These poems are not only better organized, but better written, more concise, dramatic, playful, resourceful in image and dream distortion, and in the general progression toward a unique grotesquerie of landscape which informs her autobiography better than any of her previous strategies. We know now this is Wakoski's life, even though she is a diarist of an entire generation of Americans growing up in the rough middle of the century. Now she possesses her materials by refracting and distorting them with a freer hand.

Wakoski has long depended upon a mythology derived from *Mother Goose* rimes; like many women of the century, she has drawn out a personal mythos from early childhood, perhaps the only neutral zone of a woman's existence, where she can enjoy parity with the male, and possibly feel she knows herself in the frankest, least encumbered terms. This apparition of early youth is reexamined by a jealous, suspicious, older ego, prodding the effigy of a girl in love with books, solitude, her own senses, but who ultimately forgives this spindly double her faults, and relinquishes her to memory along with all else. Wakoski has more or less ignored the woman she was, the mature but young woman always on the prowl for lovers, always disappointed once she meets them. Now she treats herself as she is, in middle age, settled, at peace with her sedentary habits, or confronts this distant recollection of her disappointed infancy. Instead of looking for more lovers, she looks for parents, either to reconcile herself with the actual parents she has complained of throughout her poetry, or to agree to surrogates selected out of childhood memory, especially Mrs. Ury, the piano teacher, whom she admired once.

This is all the unfinished business of middle age, to settle those differences, grudges, nightmares, wounds of childhood once and for all. The lovers intervened as a stage of those problems, hardly their solution. She

would trade the King of Spain, whom every girl waits for, and accept perhaps a lesser apparition in the Marsh King. But she moves out of this emotional terrain reluctantly; much of her poetic lexicon is steeped in the early mythologies of loneliness and lovelessness, from which these *Mother Goose* figures leapt to allegorical life. In *The Magician's Feastletters*, the allegorical ciphers are fewer and richer: there is the frog prince, the lily pad on which he dreams, the well, the golden ball, the girl who will one day become a princess, a Marsh king, her father; and each of these ciphers is alloyed with human beings, who are frog-faced, have lily-white skin, fingers like the calla lily, who have a "green thumb," or who otherwise become vegetative grotesques in the slightly dreamy narrative of remembering and relishing one's life.

Her creatures are curiously edible and are not far removed from poems devoted strictly to eating, to preparing good dishes, buying food, savoring ingredients, learning to cook, and thinking of those desires of the past that are culinary in import. In other words, in middle age one devours instead of courts; one wants now, in the belly, what might remain patiently in one's longings. The hedonist has replaced the dreamer; Wakoski is a careful sybarite, refusing cheaper pleasures of "white rice," candy, sodas, but taking her fill of good things, the six books allowed by the library, the delicious morning tea, the perfect egg poached in white vinegar and water, the "ice-cold tap water" with a slice of lemon, to please the belly instead of the womb. Finally, she is herself edible, a vegetable goddess:

> My body glistens,
> snail moon,
> delicate lettuce of leaf breasts,
> cucumber skin,
> pale moistness of early summer . . .

In much of her work, summer was her season, and it provoked much whining and complaining in her poems, often to the point of dull prolixity. It is always boring to complain, especially without hope of solution. Her sexual problems, drawn out and examined in monotonous particulars, may have articulated some of the frustrations shared by other women, may have illuminated this dark side of women's consciousness in the age of liberation, but never inspired Wakoski to triumph lyrically over these insatiable urges and morbid disappointments. Summer for Wakoski was really a kind of

winter of dissimilarities; she begrudged all the long trek of youth as she found everyone smarter, more handsome, more sexy, taller, more powerful than she; she wrote a vast canon of journal complaints on the rigors of being short, homely, intellectual in a fierce nation that lives on appearances alone. Once those disparities levelled off in middle age, Wakoski could come to terms with herself. In fact, she forgives herself, and now appears to love her own life enough to concentrate on its magical properties, its transforming gifts, its powerful glimpses into some other realm beyond appearance or contingency. She is cocooned, she writes, in that small apartment in East Lansing, where she darkens the rooms, dislikes dawn, waits until dusk to go out and smell the potted flowers on her balcony, prepare her supper in perfect solitude, and write as if she were finally discovering her identity as a woman in America. "I do bless my sedentary habits," she says, a Liza Doolittle in a room somewhere, safely beyond the awkward age. "Winter," she says, "is the major season in my life." Now many characters wear her cap of darkness, and bear these curious edible appendages of summer, as she enters this new "world where desire has been eliminated."

The poems in both books are still fast, smooth skeins of language, loose in syntax, spaced airily to read very quickly, in which pages must be turned almost too fast. She is still very much a poet of "talking blues," but she grows profound in these new works, and seizes the focus of a diarist of a generation more confidently. I regard her as the ablest chronicler of a generation that has seen most of the wars and collapses of the nation in this century, and who has watched the sexual revolution redefine family, work, sexual identity, marriage, and old age. The only other poet who can match her voluminous journal-poetry is Allen Ginsberg, and together they have written the emotional history of modern America. △

Considering How Exaggerated Music Is. LESLIE SCALAPINO. North Point. 1982.

by CRAIG WATSON

Leslie Scalapino writes serial poems made up of short, inter-related texts, unified by narrative tensions and imagetic continuities. *Considering How Exaggerated Music Is* collects three published chapbooks with three new works and explores the poet's vision of dislocation and confluence between her public and personal selves. The sense of alienation and displacement which run through Scalapino's poems does not describe existential resignation, though there is a dream-like sense of mystery in which subjectivity is as fluid, frightening and uncontrolled as the world of external events. Through a compositional technique which relies on association rather than story-telling to maintain narrative interest, Scalapino's poems maintain a surface tension between the source of events and the writer's response to them. Aware of her presence as a participant rather than simply an observer-recorder, she struggles between the need to enter a public world with a sense of self-resolution, and her conflicting sense of distance and interiority which prevents such an objectification of the inner self. Thus, she is intrigued and disoriented by seemingly familiar events which suddenly become unusual, even grotesque.

Scalapino frequently describes human events in terms of animal anatomy and actions as a way of combining both her associative prowess and the sense of dislocation it produces.

> So I decided watching an old woman like her, who could rise so
> easily
> on her hind legs from a chair at a party and single out
> a young man that they could be satyrs. So erect.
> With even the same look on her face which I saw one day, later
> as she passed me on the street as she was hurrying forward
> and not seeing me, wheeling on her pelvis with a shock
> of hair standing out from her forehead and only the muscles
> of her haunches appearing to move.

Other shifting devices are used by Scalapino to create distance and ambiguity. Her use of long quotations and parentheses divert attention from

straight narrative and reinforce the speech-like syntax of the work. Such techniques display her wandering associative train and the way her subjective connections are made.

> I was not thinking about the woman whom I had heard about once
> who could read the minds of dogs (as I remember, she even
> diagnosed
> dogs' illnesses), once when I passed a man on the sidewalk downtown
> (he was dancing, moving around in circles to the music
> that was piped out of a bullhorn in front of the door of a music
> store);
> but (maybe because of the way he pulled his neck back—
> with his shoulders heaving in time to the music—which is the way a
> dog
> bites down on a stick when it's being yanked out of his mouth),
> I immediately had the idea that the man was hungry,
> undoubtedly
> because I hadn't eaten yet that day.

While all the pieces use a serial mode of continuity, "This eating and walking at the same time is associated all right" is a cycle of short texts in which lines are often repeated or slightly altered. The poem has four parts, each of which comments and alters the preceding section.

> Ate and then if I don't get to know this one person and also some
> mercenaries
> were killed when they were fighting in another country
> I'd say
> we're not going to have any social hierarchy after I've died.

and:

> I've changed my mind, I don't think there's going to be a social hi-
> erarchy
> after I've died
> I'd have to kill someone
> in order for us not to be connected.

It is precisely the nature of being "connected" that dominates Scalapino's imagination. She does not feel uniformly alienated from the world, though the nature of her connection to events and people is plasticized by a shifting sense of interior subjectivity. In the final series, "Considering how exaggerated music is," the prose poems are more distinctly self-contained and the

writer seems more comfortable with the complexities and contradictions of her perceptions and thoughts.

> I saw some men doing construction work in the street and the feeling I had was they shouldn't do the work then or walk around. There should be a lack of skill or at any rate no movement occurring so that the surroundings were not pleasant and the area they were in then was affluent, was well-off. Someone who ordinarily was skilled at the time has a lessening or crippling of his ability so that he comes sexually, and people just walking around have this sensation only not so strong.

As Scalapino's voice matures through this book, it continues to focus on conflicts and dissonance. Though at times the writing becomes entangled in tangential shifting devices or unnecessarily weighted by animal symbology, it is from a sense of contradictions and strange displacements that the best poems develop. Scalapino's achievement is in her ability to maintain these struggles as the foreground of an innovative and personal poetry. △

Le Fou. ROBERT CREELEY.
Golden Goose Press. 1953.

by PAUL BLACKBURN

Note:

In early 1953 Robert Creeley's and Paul Blackburn's careers were just getting off the ground and their friendship was at a high point. *Proensa*, Blackburn's first book of translations from the Provençal, was soon to be released by Creeley's Mallorca-based Divers Press; a book of his original poems —eventually titled *The Dissolving Fabric*—was slated for publication by Creeley at the end of the year. Although they had met only once, the two men were voluminous correspondents: Blackburn was the New York distributor for Divers Press, and each valued highly the other's opinion of his work. Creeley's first book of poems, *Le Fou*, had just been published by Golden Goose Press. When Blackburn got a copy, he sent Creeley a letter saying that the book was "a very great joy" (February 14, 1953). By way of

critique, he divided the poems in the book into three categories: "pieces I like best"; "so-so, but make it"; "not made, somehow."

Blackburn's commentary on the book would, no doubt, have been left at this usual level of informal and private literary conversation had there not been a series of crossed signals at this point. Creeley thought, on the basis of a letter he had received from Kenneth Lash, that *Le Fou* was going to get a review in Lash's *New Mexico Quarterly*. Fearing the chosen critic would misunderstand his work, Creeley asked Blackburn—who was at that time reviewing another book for the magazine—to volunteer to take on an additional project. By way of explanation for this request Creeley writes on April 26, 1953: "Your list, on Le Fou, is the straightest comment I'd got . . . you are a very damn shrewd man. If I didn't think you knew what you do damn well know about all of this, I wouldn't bother with it—but when I can get one [i.e., review] by you, I feel that much the surer."

So Blackburn wrote the review, assuming Creeley was taking care of clearing it with Lash, and that publication was assured. When he sent it to the *New Mexico Quarterly*, however, Lash wrote back that he didn't want it, didn't want any Creeley review at all, in fact. It seems Creeley had misread Lash's strong initial expression of interest in the book as a promise to give it public attention. Lash told Blackburn that he did not consider *Le Fou* to have priority over a number of other books he had recently received. He was sorry, but he could not run Blackburn's piece.

Blackburn never sent it anywhere else. The review was done as a favor to Creeley and a labor of love, but Blackburn was generally reluctant to do any critical writing. During his lifetime Blackburn published less than a dozen articles. When he was working on another Creeley-inspired piece—this one a discussion of the Albigensian crusades that was published in the *Black Mountain Review*, "A Sad Story"—he agonized over it for months and wrote Creeley on January 27, 1954: "I am of the firm opinion that I cannot write prose. I sweat it. Four starts to the article and every one of them too damned scholarly." He published only three book reviews, the one in the *New Mexico Quarterly* of Hugh Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, one of Spanish novelist Ramon Sender's *Before Noon* in *The Nation*, and a piece on Robert Kelly's *Armed Descent* for *Kulchur*. Which is too bad. Blackburn's letters and the few pieces he did write show he possessed a concise and fast-paced prose style, and a good deal of literary insight.

Ramon Sender, who Blackburn had never met, contacted him after the review of *Before Noon* appeared in *The Nation*. He writes from New Mexico on April 18, 1958:

> I have just read your beautiful article on my book and I want to tell you as soon as possible how grateful I am. My book has had the good fortune to fall into the hands of a poet and what you say about it is what I dreamed that someday someone would say about a book of mine. . . . If I were in New York, I would try to get in touch with you. . . . Meanwhile, I will look for your writings in our library. A reader like you must also be a magnificent writer.

I recently found the Creeley review among Blackburn's papers at University of California, San Diego's Archive for New Poetry. It is his only extant unpublished book review; an article on mimeograph magazines, intended for 1963 publication in *The Nation*, was also discovered, along with various readers' reports from the late 1950's and mid-1960's, when Blackburn was doing freelance work for a number of publishing companies. The Sender and Creeley letters are at the Archive for New Poetry, and Blackburn's letters to Creeley are at the Washington University Libraries, St. Louis.

—EDITH JAROLIM

△

A single ghost coalesces behind these twenty-three poems, one spirit, one voice speaking them, talking them: one voice, apart, needing the contact with reality the poem provides: a ghostly maker, alone and indivisible.

The sense of privacy is very great.

The voice in the poems deals with the human equation, deals with the utmost probity, deals the cards from the deck, one by one, exposing his hand, exposing your hand too. The human equation.

Miller said it didn't balance. Creeley knows it doesn't balance. He knows most of it is on the negative side. And that's where he puts it—most of it. And therein is the success of the individual poem. If he could draw a balance, if he could wiggle and shimmy and oversimplify and manage to draw a clean balance, he would no longer have a poem.

So you have this accident, this intangible, this minus sign, and you sit up all night breaking your head over it. It's real. It's not a fraud, a trick with words. It is out of balance. He is not trying to create a reason for his exis-

tence, no, nor for your existence. He can't idealize it. And I like that in him, this voice, this ghost. He is trying to discard his ideal self. And I like that in him. When he feels a fool, he says it, and shamefacedly.

> Cares mount. My own
> certainly
> as much as anyone else's. (from "The Rites")

The definite feeling, directly received.

> The rites are care, the natures
> less simple, the mark of hell knows what but
> something, the trace of
>
> line, trace of
> line made by someone
>
> Ultimate: no man shall go unattended.
> No man shall be an idiot for purely exterior reasons.

He is looking for it. It is there, it is real. It is minus something. He has a reason, therefore, to go on. He puts his whole life into the balance to produce something. Minus. He puts his whole life: his wife, his child, his affairs, the objects around him, his childhood memories, his friends, his view of society, his integrity, into the balance, to create—a minus. It is there. It is real. And he finds it lacking. Only madmen draw up balance sheets that are equal. He is not mad. When madmen or fools draw it up, the figures jibe. He is not a fool. And when he feels one, when he has tried to idealize it, and failed, and feels a fool, he says so. There is no perfect order, and he is not mad enough or fool enough to try to create one. Nor does he try to create disorder.

> I pulled up the street as you suggested
> —and found what?
> 1 nickel
> 2 pieces gum
> etc.
>
> But we are practical
> —but winter is long & however much one
> does save, there is never
> enough. ("Something for Easter")

To create disorder, you must destroy every form of order. Some forms which exist in life, in the relationship, he does destroy. And the order he makes, when he makes it, is this madness, this poem. But it turns out ultimately sane, adds up to minus. He knows it. It gives him a reason to go on.

Some of the poems are clean and lovely in their love and their mirrors of love: "A Song," "The Crisis," "Hart Crane (1)." Some are hideous in their beauty: "The Riddle," "Canzone," the endings of "The Rhyme," and "The Cantos." The title poem, "Le Fou," is sheer sensation, sheer breath, sheer breathlessness. "The Innocence" is sheer, fine utterance of connection with a real world and the man's place in it.

> .....Here the leaves
> come, there
> is the rock in evidence
>
> or evidence. ("The Innocence")

And some poems fail: "For Rainer Gerhardt," "Guido," "Hart Crane (2)," "Littleton, N.H.," "Helas." The last by a narrow margin. You can't make it every time.

There is no simple way for him to deal with it, the life, our lives, his life, what you will. There is no 'incisive imagery,' no 'compelling metaphor.' It is the utter concentration of finally saying it. And he says it with exactitude. He says it with care. And it's there for you. It's real. And it's minus something. You can see that it's minus something. That's what he's saying.

> I saw her
> and behind her there were
> flowers, and behind them
> nothing. ("The Rhyme")

She stands there and the world disappears. To recover love. She and then the flowers, and that is all and that is the center. And behind them, nothing. It is not romantic, it is terrible. The woman can use her sex in sheer kindness, or in utter malevolence. You can surrender to the malevolence or fight the kindness, or the other way round. But if she is just there, she and the flowers? The ultimate. Something is not there. It is the world—terrible! And to have to accept it, terrifying. Or the woman comes like a question. Asking. Or it is a demand, and the man can do nothing but give in, and

give nothing. Not himself. Not even his hate.

.....The women

imperative, the man
lost in stern
thought: ("The Riddle")

Feeling the separation, the separateness, the lack in him, feeling only her, there, demanding.

.....One is
too lonely, one wants
to stop there, at the edge of

conception. ("The Riddle")

Some of these records, these attitudes, are hard for the reader to take as held. But such struggles are real knowledge, however 'un-nice'. It is not nice idealism, it is direct blood knowledge of the struggle. And the poet-man is not always "lost in stern thought," but sometimes querulous, petulant; and it is then so stated.

Let me say (in anger) that since the day we were
married
we have never had a towel
where anyone could find it,
the fact.
Notwithstanding that I am not
simple to live with, not
my own judgment, but no
matter.
There are other things. ("The Crisis")

"The Ball Game" is a humorous poem, or call it so, but even there he repeats the pattern of disaster and loss, the incompleteness of the scene, the act, the minus, the negative balance stated that proves the living condition, the partial evidence that prolongs the search and compels the attention and the living presence, to find the area of struggle and define it by entering the struggle, against woman or child or language or fatuity, and stating each failure explicitly, wanting like any other man, I suppose, to get in out of the rain, but not going in, remaining, going his road in the middle of the

storm, against the storm, finding his partial evidence, his minus balance, his reason, therefore, to go on. Given wholly:

The Innocence

Looking to the sea, it is a line
of unbroken mountains.

It is the sky.
It is the ground. There
we live, on it.

It is a mist
now tangent to another
quiet. Here the leaves
come, there
is the rock in evidence

or evidence.
What I come to do
is partial, partially kept.

The comment is insufficient. Try Jeremiah, 15:16. A new voice, speaking truly, a true voice. I recommend it to you. △

▲

Errata notes on Jackson Mac Low's "Winds"/"Instruments"
which appeared in *Sulfur* 6:

On page 5 line 4 should be "in" not "by"
On page 17 paragraph 3 line 1 should be "tier" not "tiner"
On page 19 paragraph 1 line 4, sixth word should be "moo" not "moon"
On page 19 paragraph 3 line 4, fourth word should be "on" not "in"
On page 21 line 1 should be "sing" not "singing"
On page 21 line 3 should be "strong" not "strange"
On page 22 last line "he" should be in italics
On page 23 line 1 should be "arctic" not "artic"
On page 23 between lines 6 & 7 insert the word "a" between "on" and "lute"

CATERPILLAR

M A G A Z I N E

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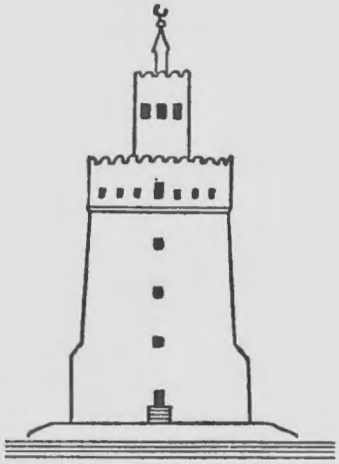

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